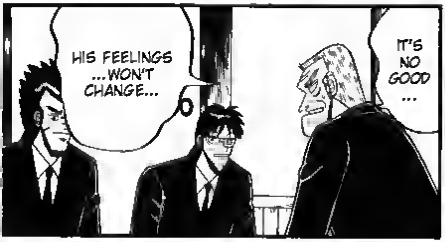
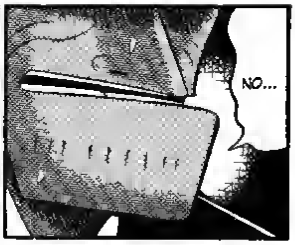
CHAPTER 145
LIFE AND DEATH

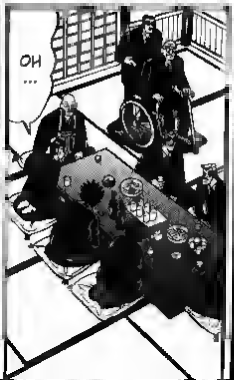
カラッ!

GINJI.
A LITTLE PAST 11 PM.
40 MINUTES AFTER LEAVING THE ROOM
GINJI'S RETURN WAS

THAT THING...
DID YOU TALK HIM OUT OF IT...?
THAT ...
AKAGI...
HOW'D IT GO.....?


HIS FEELINGS ...WON'T CHANGE...
IT'S NO GOOD ...

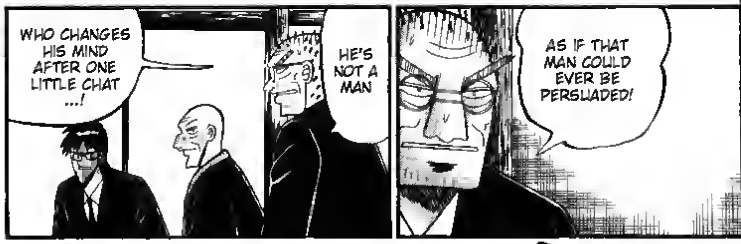

NO...


OH ...

... ...

HEH HEH HEH ...

THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING...!


WHO CHANGES HIS MIND AFTER ONE LITTLE CHAT ...!
HE'S NOT A MAN
AS IF THAT MAN COULD EVER BE PERSUADED!

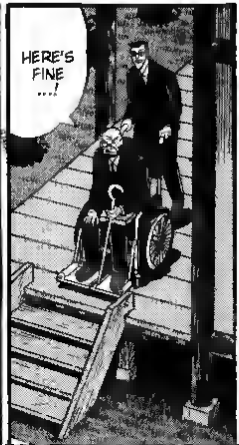
I WANT THAT ...!
HEY YOU .....!
OF COURSE THAT'S THE RESULT ...

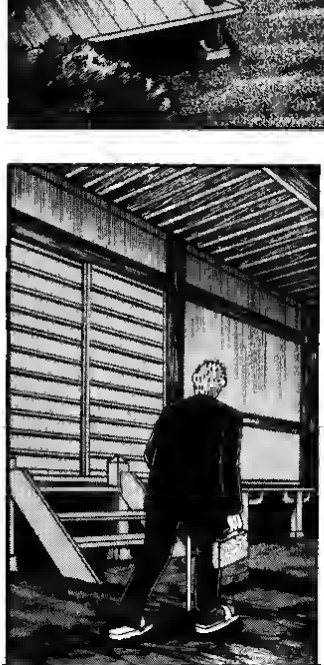
YESSIR ...!
BRING THOSE TILES ALONG ...!
LET'S GO ...!
NOW THEN
MHM ...
SOGA ...!
I'LL STOP HIM .....!

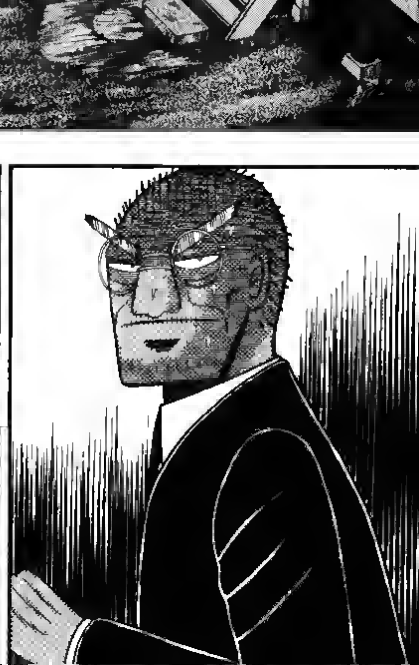
TO
HIS
LAST
MEETING
WITH
AKAGI
...

THE 5TH PERSON TO GO WAS SOGA..!

I CAN GO BY MYSELF FROM HERE ...!


HERE'S FINE ...!





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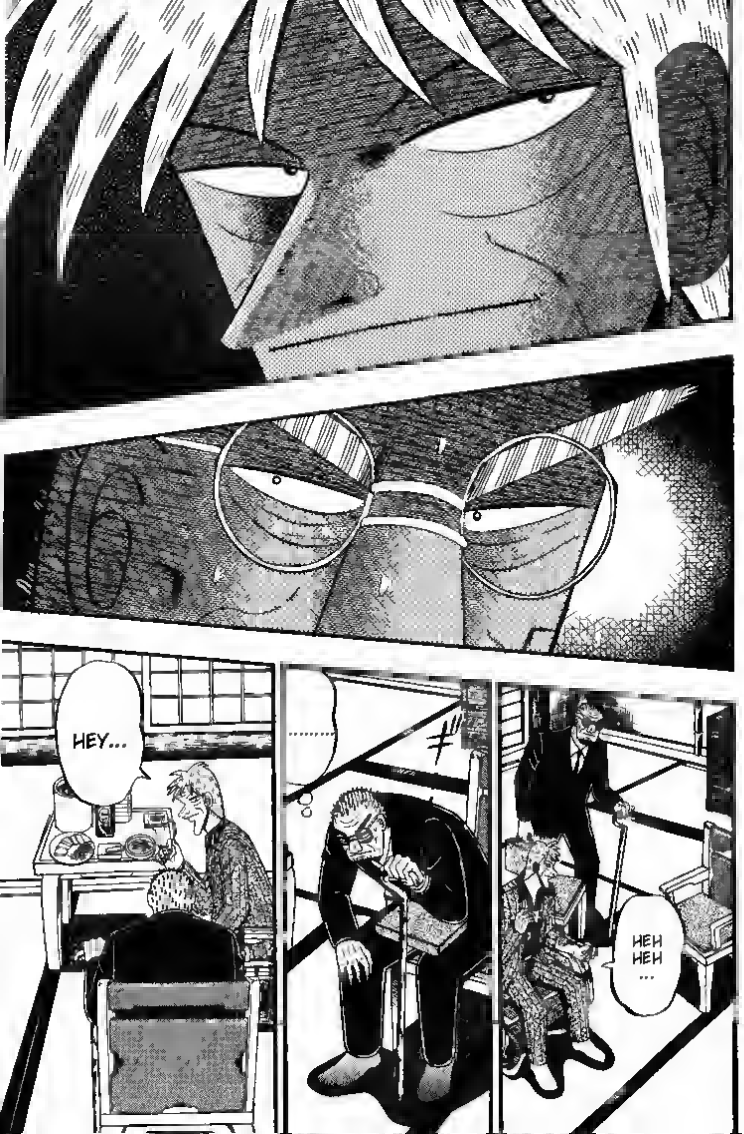
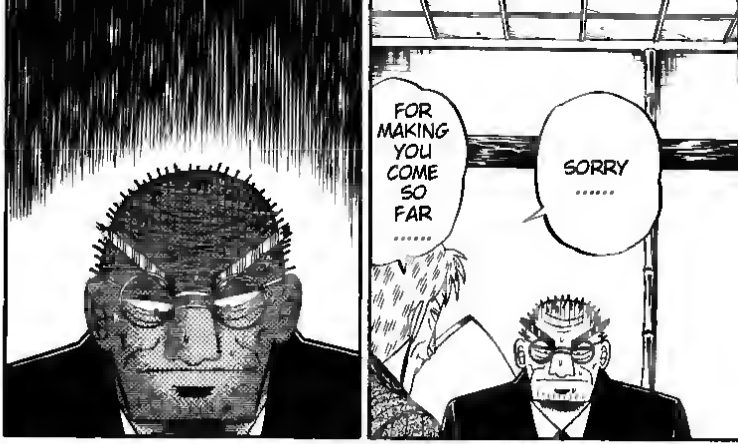
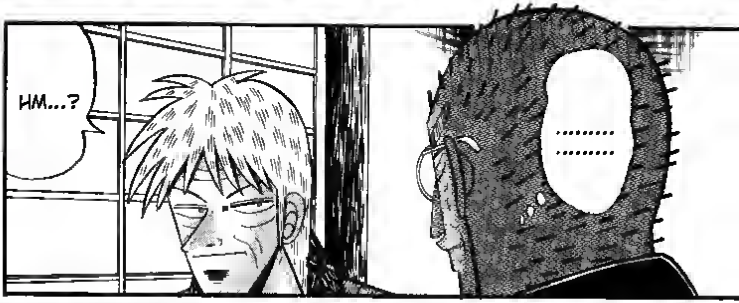
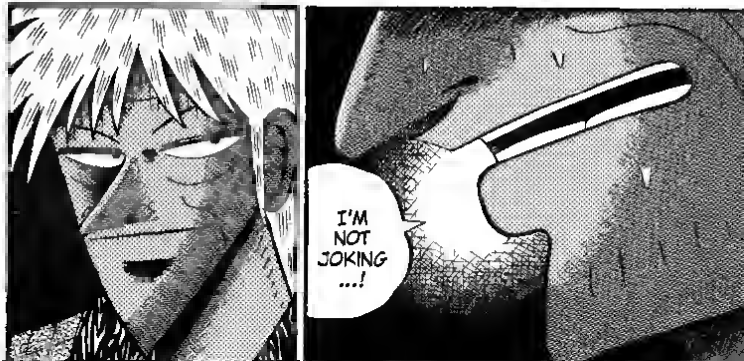
ガタ…
ガタ…
ガタ…
ガラ…


HEY...
.....
HEH HEH ...


SORRY .....
FOR MAKING YOU COME SO FAR .....

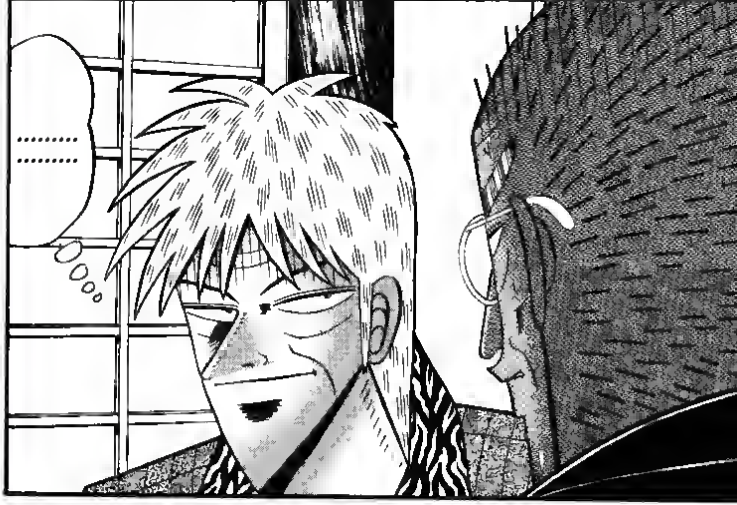

HM...?
.....
.....


I'M NOT JOKING ...!

THEN YOU AND I...
IF YOU SAY THAT YOU'RE GOING TO DIE, NO MATTER WHAT

I'M NOT GOING TO LET YOU DIE ON ME...!

NEED TO HAVE A FINAL SHOW-DOWN .....!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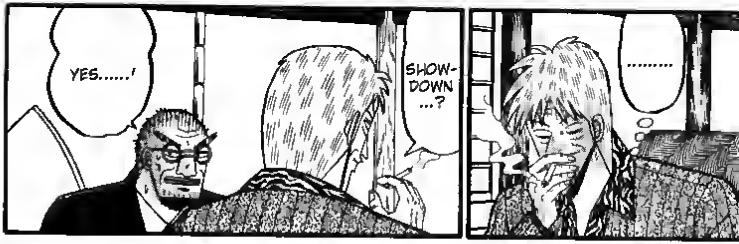
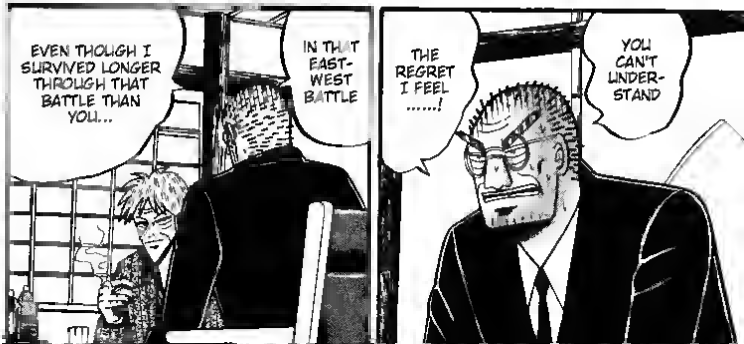

YES.....!
SHOW-DOWN ...?
.....


EVEN THOUGH I SURVIVED LONGER THROUGH THAT BATTLE THAN YOU...
IN THAT EAST-WEST BATTLE
THE REGRET I FEEL .....!
YOU CAN'T UNDER-STAND

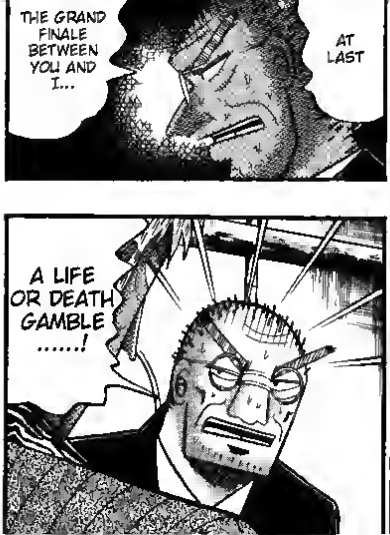
THE WORLD SEES IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND .....!
IGNORING THAT COMPLETELY ...
JUST AS BEFORE ....
YOU'RE TREATED
AS BEING BETTER THAN ME ...!
AS THINGS ARE NOW ...
IF YOU DIE HERE...
I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO SURPASS YOU IN MY LIFE...
IT'LL ALL BE OVER ...!
I'M NOT JOKING .....!
IT'S NOT GOING TO END LIKE THIS .....!

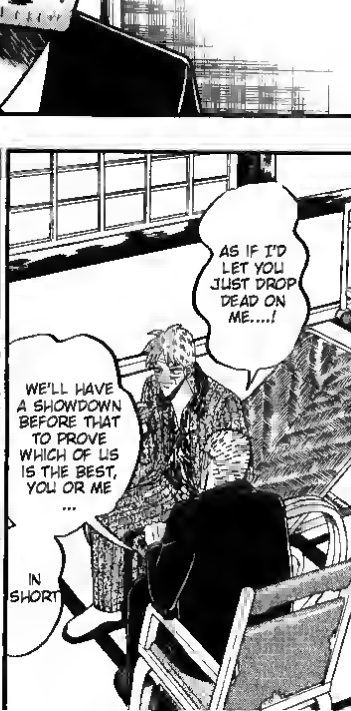
WE'RE HAVING A MATCH .....!

WELL THEN...
HEH HEH ...
.....
YOU'RE NOT JUST GOING TO DIE.....!
YES...
IS THAT WHY YOU BROUGHT THAT ALONG .....?
SO...

WE'RE HAVING ONE GAME BEFORE YOU DIE .....!

THE GRAND FINALE BETWEEN YOU AND I...
AT LAST


A LIFE OR DEATH GAMBLE .....!


AS IF I'D LET YOU JUST DROP DEAD ON ME....!
WE'LL HAVE A SHOWDOWN BEFORE THAT TO PROVE WHICH OF US IS THE BEST, YOU OR ME ...
IN SHORT

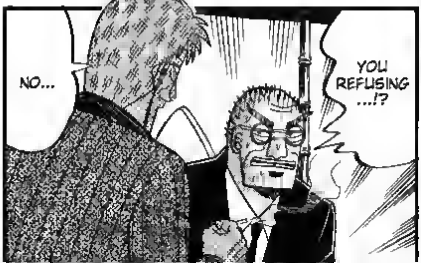
YES ...
LIFE OR DEATH .....?
IF I LOSE...
IN THIS MATCH

I'LL DIE ...!
I'LL SLICE OPEN MY OWN STOMACH ...!
IF I WIN .....
INSTEAD
タン...

YOU HAVE TO LIVE .....!!
LIVE .....?
THAT'S RIGHT ...
IT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO TAKE THE LIFE OF SOMEONE WHO SAYS HE WANTS TO DIE.
SO THIS TIME IT WILL BE THE OTHER WAY AROUND ...!
IF I WIN...

YOU'LL HAVE TO LIVE .....!
NO MATTER WHAT .....!

IT'D BE THE FIRST TIME MY DEATH WAS ON THE LINE...
HEH HEH HEH ...


NO...
YOU REFUSING ...!?

IT'S BEEN DEPRESSING ...
IT'S MUCH BETTER ...
AFTER ALL THOSE LONG SERMONS AND ANNOYINGLY SOLEMN DISCUSSIONS .....
IT SOUNDS INTER-ESTING
OF COURSE
I'D REALLY LIKE TO ACCEPT, BUT...
RATHER ENTER-TAINING .....!
TO TAKE A MORE PRACTICAL APPROACH AND BRING A GAME INTO IT...
SO.....
WHY .....!?
I'M AFRAID IT'S IMPOSSIBLE ...
SOGA...

I DON'T KNOW...
HOW TO PLAY MAHJONG ANY MORE .....!

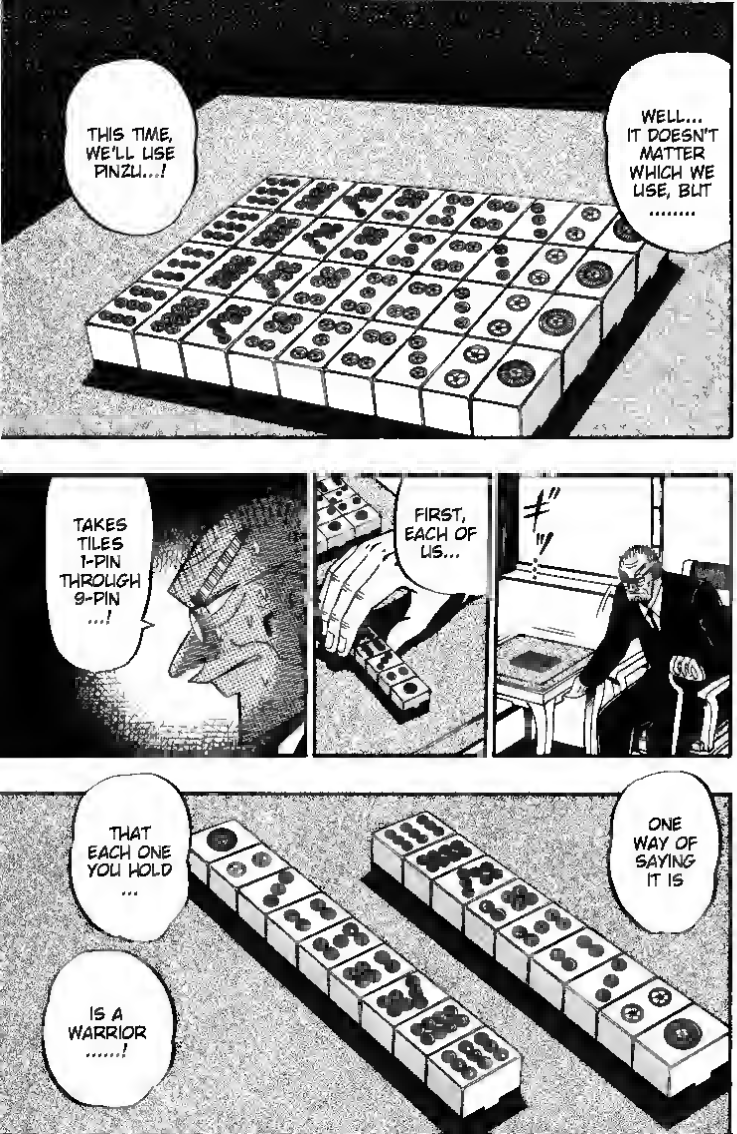
ズ
WHO ...
SAID ANYTHING ABOUT PLAYING MAHJONG ...!?
YES .....!
A DIFF-ERENT TYPE OF GAME ...?
FOR A DIFFE-RENT TYPE OF GAME ...!
WE'LL USE THE TILES, BUT ...

A PSYCHO-LOGICAL BATTLE .....!
EACH PLAYER, USING THE TILES ONE TO NINE
A FINAL BATTLE BETWEEN YOU AND I...
UNTIL ALL THE PLAYERS HAD GOTTEN TOGETHER ...
A LONG TIME AGO, WE USED TO PLAY THIS GAME TO KILL TIME...

THIS GAME OF "9" ...!

CHAPTER 146
NINE

"9" ...?
IF YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT IT, I'LL TEACH YOU...!
WHAT KIND OF A GAME WAS THAT ...?
ドミノ…
YOU'LL GET IT RIGHT AWAY ...!
IT'S A SIMPLE GAME.


THIS TIME, WE'LL USE PINZU...!
WELL... IT DOESN'T MATTER WHICH WE USE, BUT .....
TAKES TILES 1-PIN THROUGH 9-PIN ...!
FIRST, EACH OF US...
ONE WAY OF SAYING IT IS
THAT EACH ONE YOU HOLD ...
IS A WARRIOR .....!

THEN, EACH PLAYER
HOLDS THE TILES SO THAT THEIR OPPONENT CAN'T SEE THEM.
A TILE CHOSEN AT RANDOM
IS PLACED FACE-DOWN
AND THE GAME BEGINS ...!
ONCE BOTH PLAYERS PUT ONE OUT
THEY'RE REVEALED.
THE HIGHER NUMBER
IS THE ONE THAT WINS THIS GAMBLE .....!
THE PERSON WHO WINS
AGAINST THE LOSER'S TILE
IN THIS CASE, THE 4-PIN...
TAKES BACK THE 4-PIN ALONG WITH THE 5-PIN.
THIS 4-PIN AND 5-PIN ...
BECOME THE SCORE OF THE PERSON WHO WON ...
IN THIS CASE, WITH 4-PIN AND 5-PIN, IT'S NINE...

IN THE CASE OF A TIE
THEY GET NINE POINTS ...!
LEFT BEHIND ON THE TABLE
THE TILES STAY AS THEY ARE
AND NEITHER PERSON GETS THEM .....!
FOR ONLY NINE MATCHES .....
THIS IS REPEATED...
.....
THAT'S ALL .....!
SIMPLE, RIGHT...?
ARE ADDED UP...!
AT THE END, THE TILES EACH PLAYER HAS...
THE PERSON WITH THE MOST POINTS WINS.

.....
.....
A LITTLE BIT FURTHER .....
..... IF I EXPLAIN IT.....

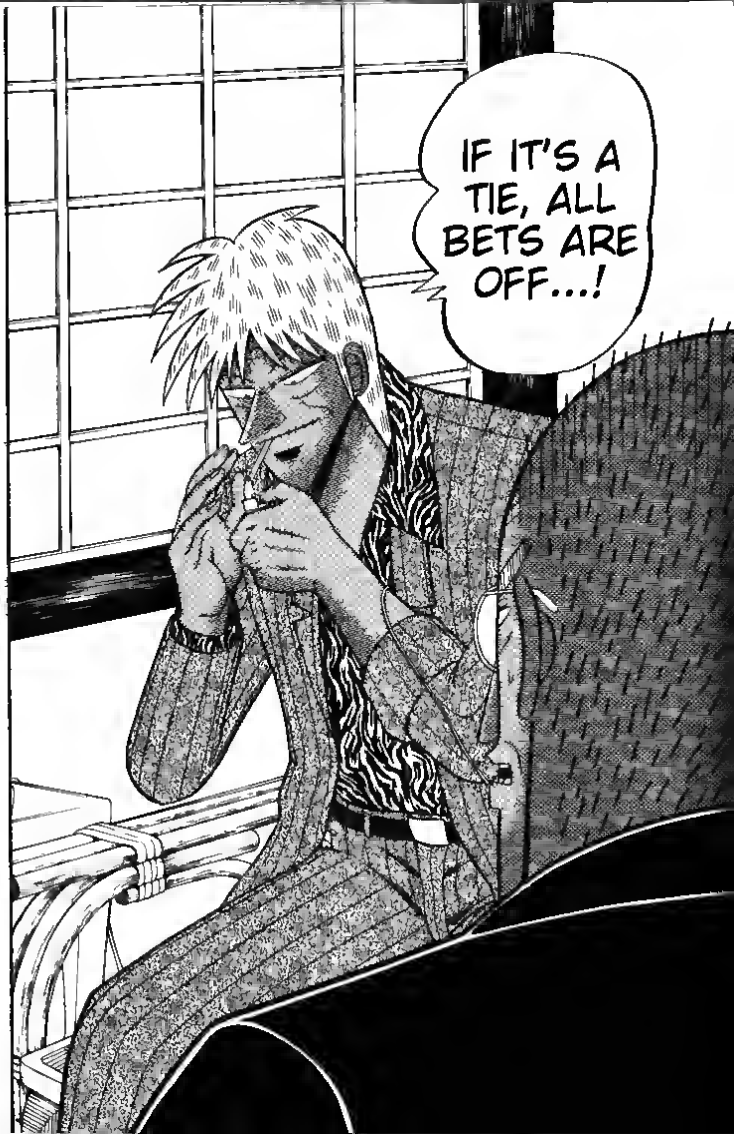
THE BASIS OF THIS GAMBLE IS...
EVEN IF BOTH WIN THE SAME NUMBER OF TIMES
IF YOU TAKE 9-PIN AND 8-PIN
YOU GET 17 POINTS, BUT
EVEN IF THE 1-PIN IS TAKEN WITH THE 2-PIN
IT'S A MERE 3 POINTS...!
IN SHORT ...
THERE CAN BE A HUGE DIFFERENCES JUST THROUGH HOW YOU WIN ...!
HOW YOU WIN IS CRUCIAL...!
TO STATE IT CLEARLY...
YOU CAN ADD IT AL LIP.
8-PIN, 7-PIN, 8-PIN
LOSING WITH ANY OF THOSE WILL HURT.
WHEN YOU FAIL TO WIN WITH A TILE THAT BY RIGHTS SHOULD HAVE WON
IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE A MAN CRY .....!

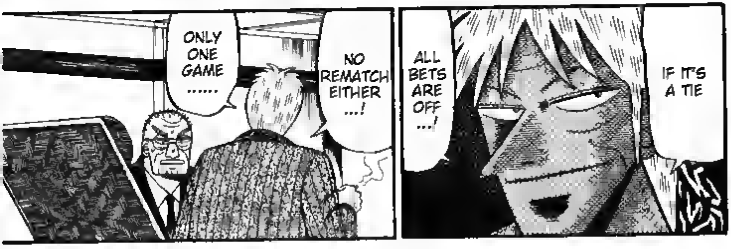
EVEN IF YOU PICK UP VICTORIES WITH 4-PIN, 5-PIN, AND SO ON
AFTER THAT
THAT TILE WILL END UP IN THE ENEMY'S HANDS.
YOU'LL NEVER REACH THEM, ...!
TO PUT IT ANOTHER WAY...
.....
CLEAN VICTORIES WITH THE HIGH-NUMBERED TILES IS VITAL...!
UP AGAINST THE ENEMY'S BEST TILES AS MUCH AS YOU CAN.
IN OTHER WORDS ...
IF YOU'RE GOING TO LOSE, YOU WANT TO PUT 1-PIN OR 2-PIN
IS A SMOOTH WAY TO LOSE .....!
LOSING A 1-PIN OR 2-PIN TO AN ENEMY'S 9-PIN

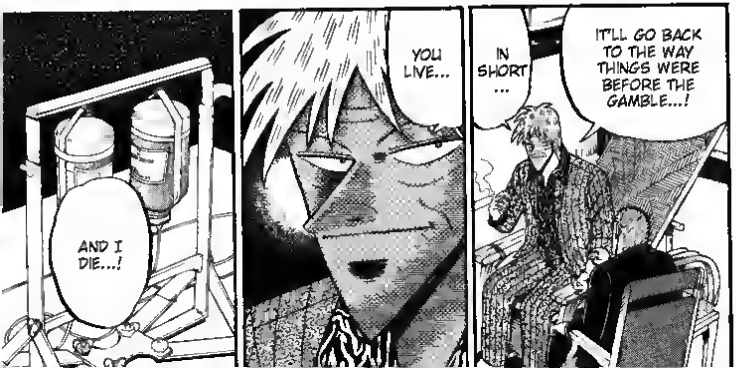
WELL...
AND IF IT GOES BADLY, THE SOUR FACE THAT THE LOSER MAKES IS...
IS WHAT WILL WIN THE GAME .....!
LOSING LIKE THAT
THE THING TO SAVOR .....!
THAT'S WHERE THE REAL ENJOYMENT OF THIS GAME COMES FROM...
NO...
DO YOU REMEMBER IT...?
.....
I UNDER-STAND IT .....!
WELL ...
BUT...
I DON'T KNOW IF I EVER PLAYED IT...

OKAY ...!
IT SOUNDS INTERESTING .....
THIS LITTLE TILE GAME .....!
THEN ...
IF I LOSE ...
AT "9"...
ニヤラ

YOU DIE...
IF I WIN...
I'LL CALL OFF MY SUICIDE AND LIVE...
.....
THAT'S WHAT IT WAS, RIGHT .....?
HEH HEH...
YES...!
SOGA...


IF IT'S A TIE, ALL BETS ARE OFF...!


ONLY ONE GAME .....
NO REMATCH EITHER ...!
ALL BETS ARE OFF ...!
IF IT'S A TIE


AND I DIE...!
YOU LIVE...
IN SHORT ...
IT'LL GO BACK TO THE WAY THINGS WERE BEFORE THE GAMBLE...!

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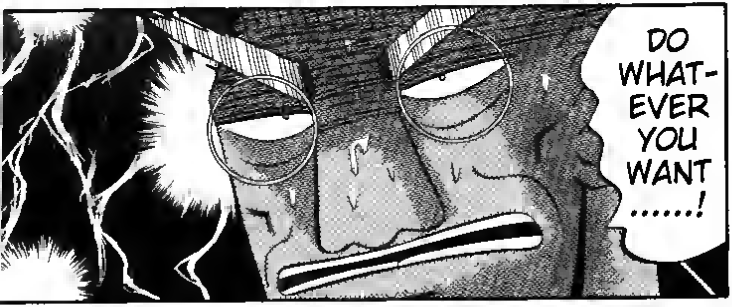
SURE …
……
IF THAT'S FINE WITH YOU, I'LL DO IT…!

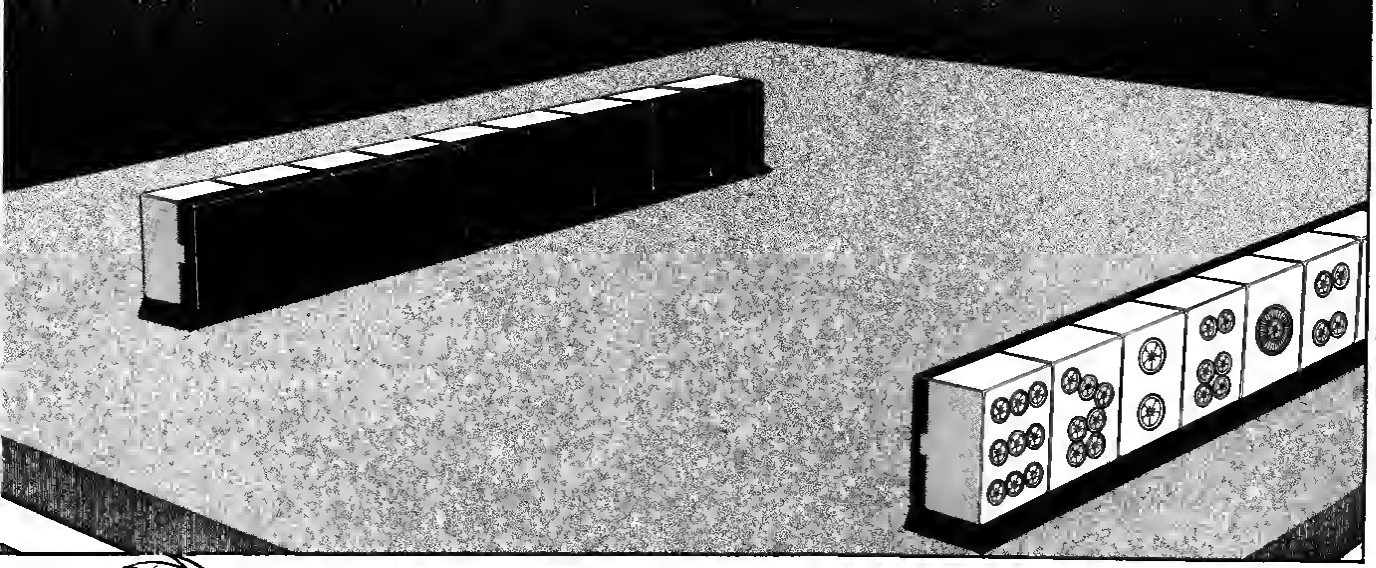
I'LL LET YOU DIE .....!
IF IT'S A TIE...


DO WHAT-EVER YOU WANT .....!

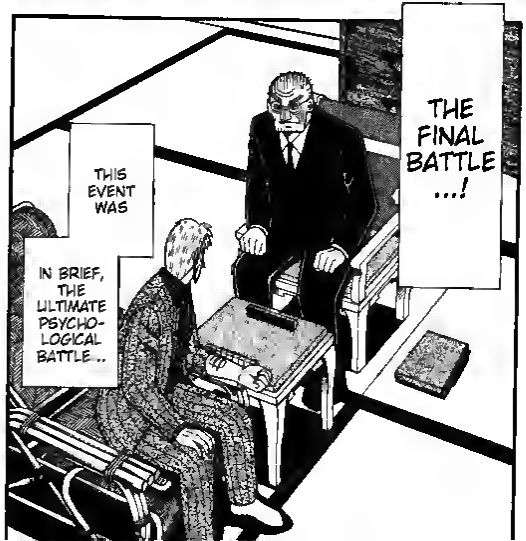
THEN...
HEH HEH ...
DIE YOUR SELFISH DEATH .....!

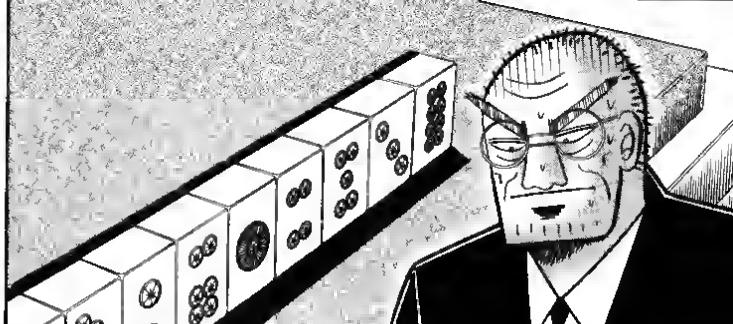
WE'LL PLAY .....!
THIS GAME OF "9" .....!

THE BATTLE THAT WOULD SETTLE IT.....
THE UNCERTAINTY BETWEEN THOSE TWO PEOPLE...
IT WAS ON ...!

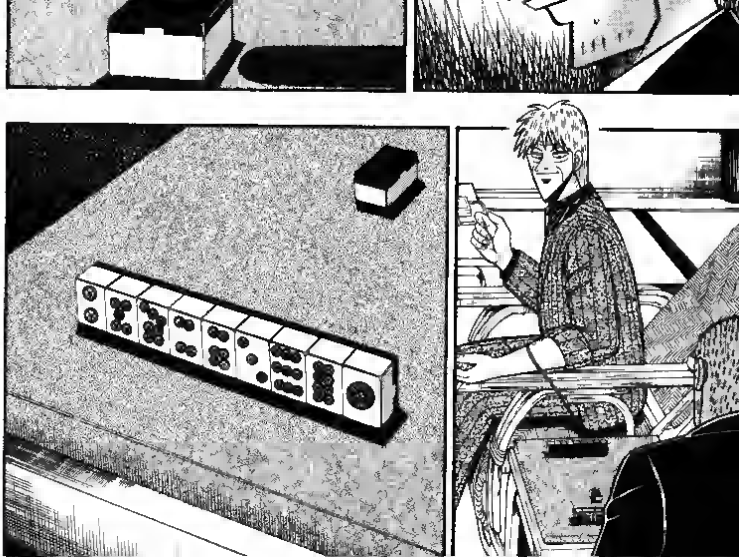

SOGA VS. AKAGI .....!

"9"...!

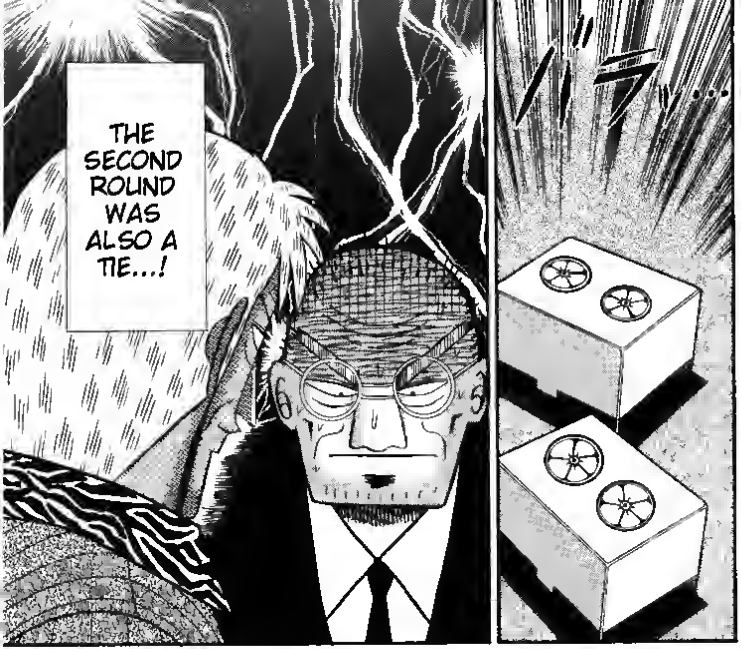

THE FINAL BATTLE ...!
THIS EVENT WAS
IN BRIEF, THE ULTIMATE PSYCHO-LOGICAL BATTLE...

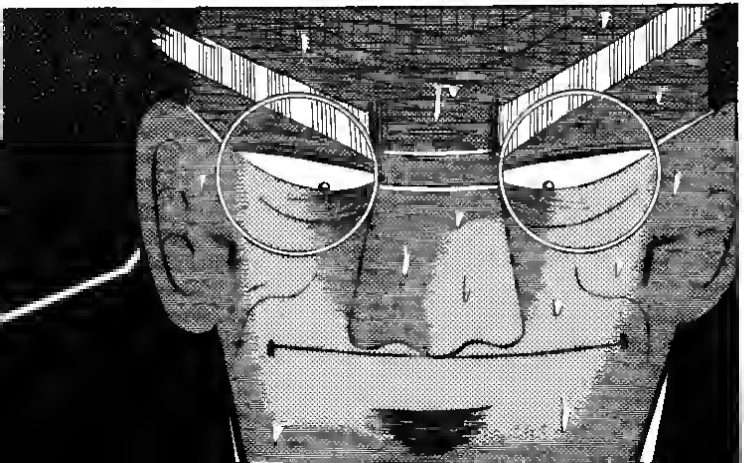


THE FIRST TILE...!



ON TO THE NEXT, THE SECOND TILE..
スッ
.....
THE FIRST TILES WERE TIED ...!
BUT...
ドサッ
トン...


THE SECOND ROUND WAS ALSO A TIE...!
ノーラッ…

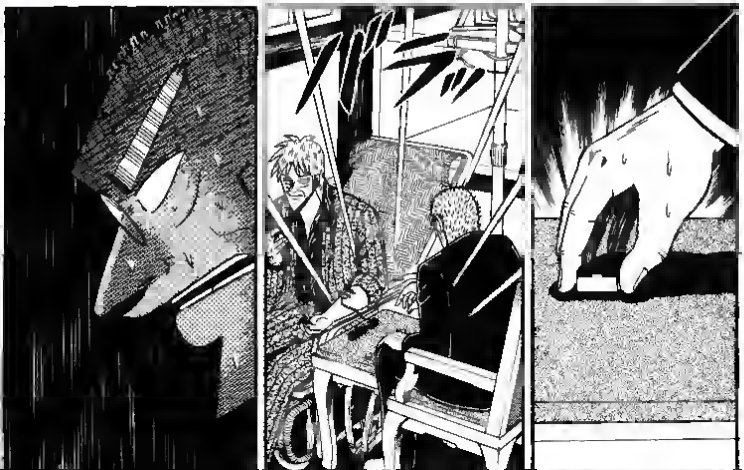


AKAGI ISN'T PLANNING TO WIN...!
AS I EXPECTED ...
サッ
HEH HEH...
.....
SO THAT I LIVE AND HE DIES ...!
HE'S AIMING FOR A TIE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING...
WILL BE PERFECTLY MATCHED ...!
UNTIL FINALLY BOTH OUR POINTS
THE SAME TILE... OR AT MOST A DIFFERENCE OF ONE OR TWO...
AND SO...
REPEATING A SERIES OF WINS AND LOSSES...

THAT'S HIS WEAK POINT .....!
WITH MY INTUITION AND INSIGHT
I...
IF I CAN STRIKE AT HIM THERE, I CAN WIN .....!
BUT...
PRIDE MYSELF ON NOT YIELDING TO ANYONE

AS SOME INHUMAN DEMON...!
ON THE SAME LEVEL...
I'D HAVE NO CHANCE TO WIN AGAINST HIM...!
AKAGI IS.....
WITH AKAGI AS MY OPPONENT, IT'S A DIFFERENT STORY.....!
IF HE'S NOT PLANNING TO WIN...
BUT ...
IS WEAK ...
IF AKAGI'S WILL

THERE'S A CHANCE I CAN WIN .....!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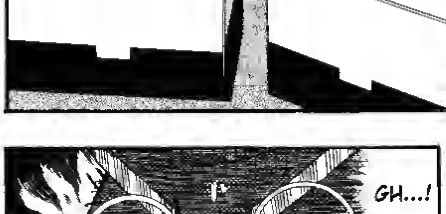
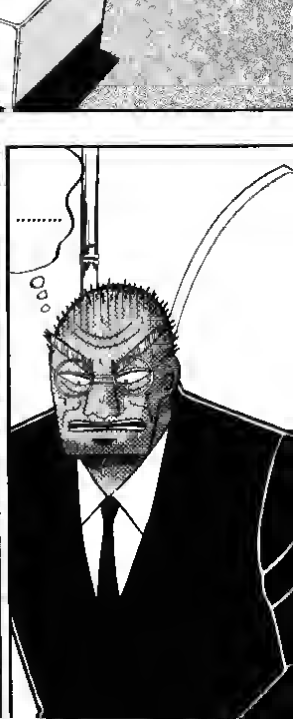
THE THIRD ROUND WAS A TIE TOO .....!


GH...!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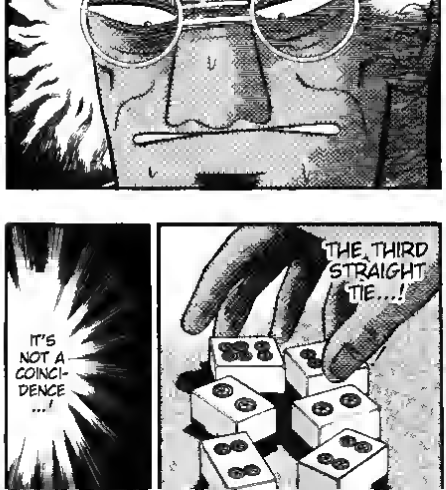
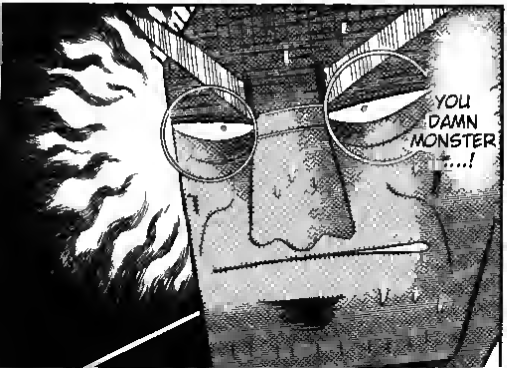
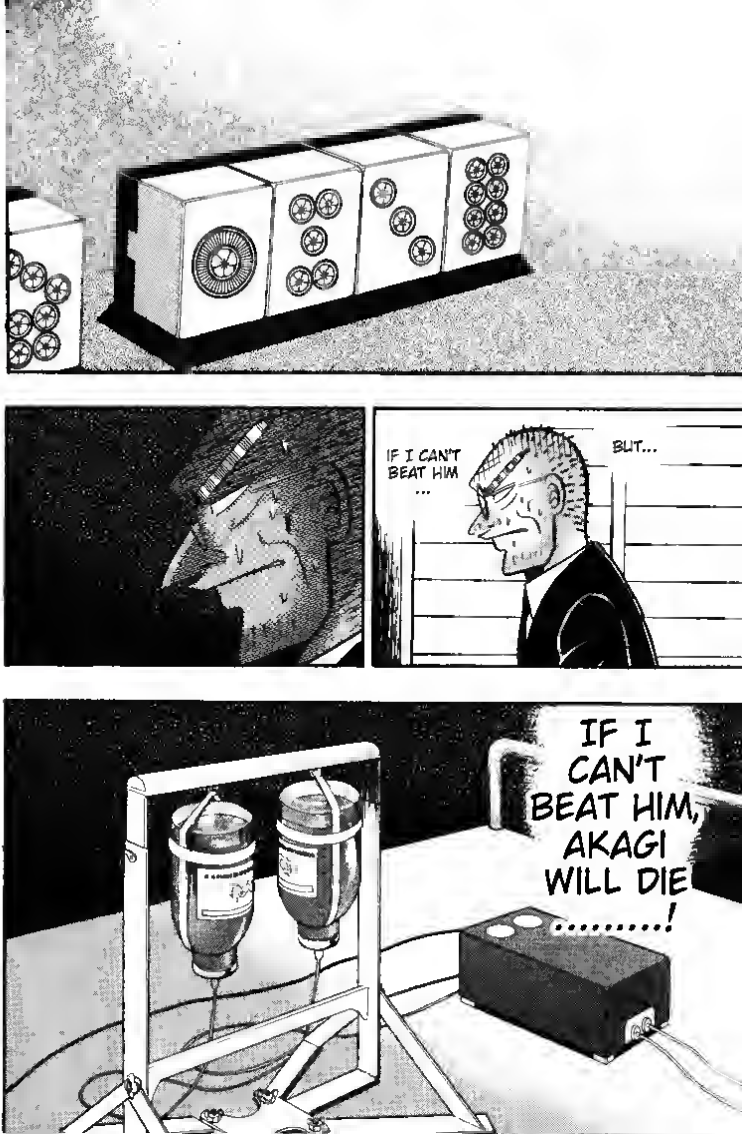

IT'S NOT A COINCI-DENCE ...!
THE THIRD STRAIGHT TIE...!

THIS THING .....!
HE'S DOING THIS ON PURPOSE .....

THIS MAN .....!


YOU DAMN MONSTER ....!


IF I CAN'T BEAT HIM ...
BUT...
IF I CAN'T BEAT HIM, AKAGI WILL DIE .....!

CHAPTER 147
GODLIKE SKILL

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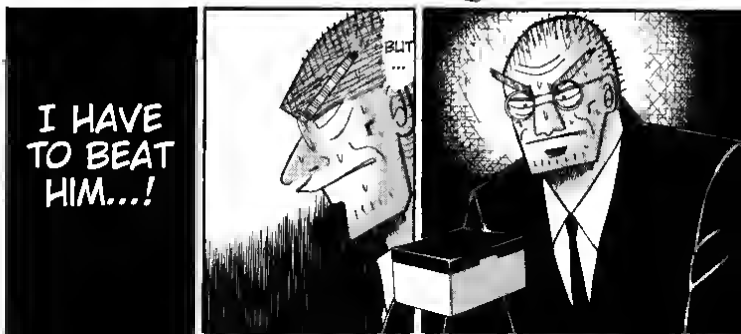
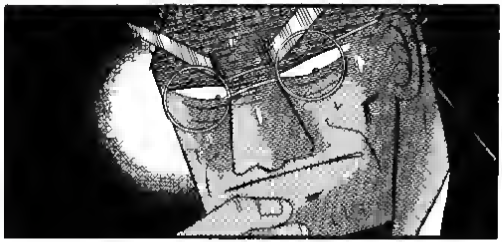
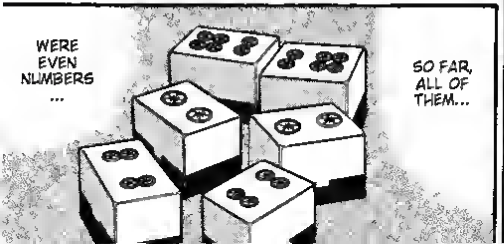
THREE STRAIGHT TIES...!

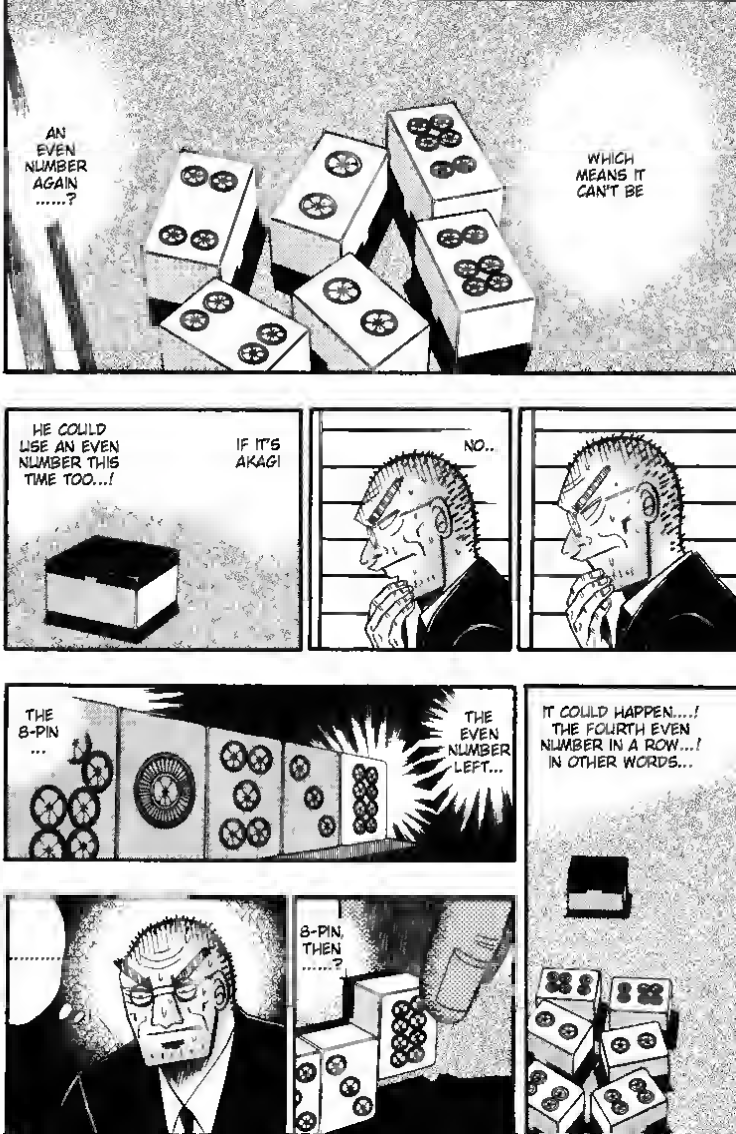
IN OTHER WORDS, 9 X 8 X 7 IS 504...
A 1/504 CHANCE ...?
WORKING IT OUT, THAT'S ..... 1/9 X 1/8 X 1/7 .....?
THIS IS THE THIRD ONE, WHICH MEANS .....
.....
BY THIS POINT...!
IT'S ALREADY A GOD-LIKE ABILITY ..
.....
ス!!...

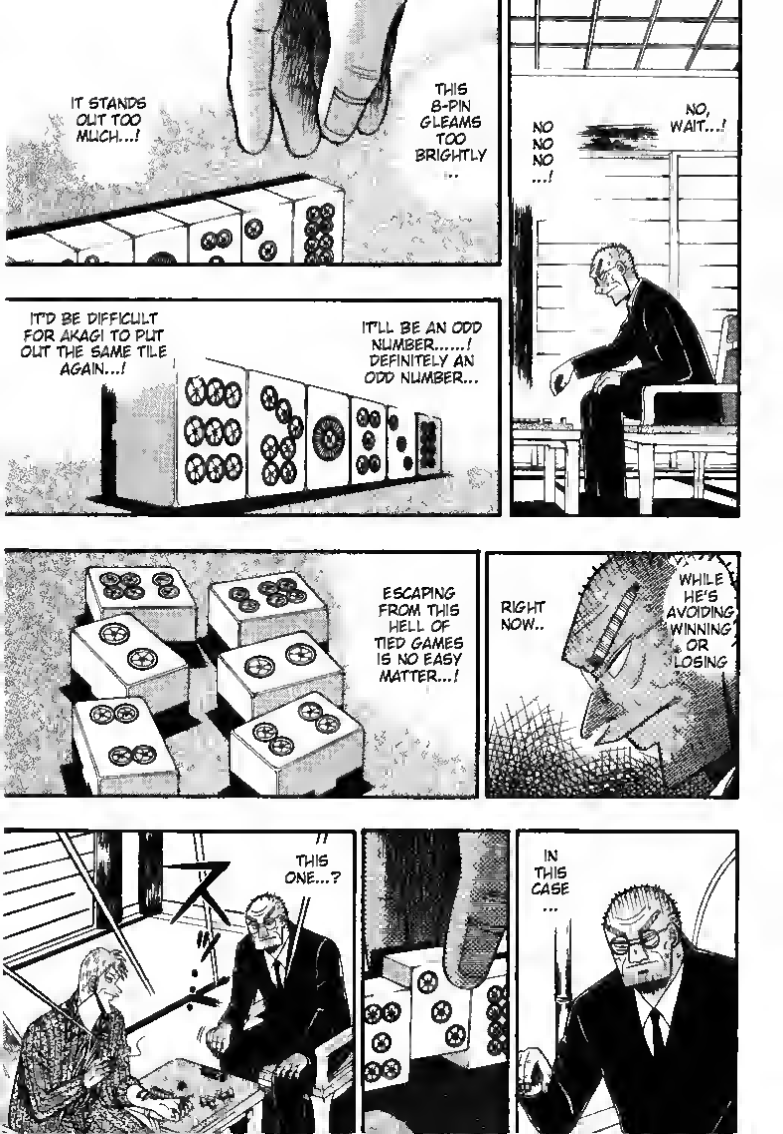

I HAVE TO BEAT HIM...!
BUT ...

I CAN'T LET AKAGI SHIGERU DIE...!




WERE EVEN NUMBERS ...
SO FAR, ALL OF THEM...


AN EVEN NUMBER AGAIN .....?
WHICH MEANS IT CAN'T BE
HE COULD USE AN EVEN NUMBER THIS TIME TOO...!
IF IT'S AKAGI
NO..
THE 8-PIN ...
THE EVEN NUMBER LEFT...
IT COULD HAPPEN....! THE FOURTH EVEN NUMBER IN A ROW...! IN OTHER WORDS...
.....
8-PIN, THEN .....?


IT STANDS OUT TOO MUCH...!
THIS 8-PIN GLEAMS TOO BRIGHTLY ...
NO NO NO ...!
NO, WAIT...!
IT'D BE DIFFICULT FOR AKAGI TO PUT OUT THE SAME TILE AGAIN...!
IT'LL BE AN ODD NUMBER.....! DEFINITELY AN ODD NUMBER...
ESCAPING FROM THIS HELL OF TIED GAMES IS NO EASY MATTER...!
RIGHT NOW..
WHILE HE'S AVOIDING WINNING OR LOSING
THIS ONE...?
IN THIS CASE ...

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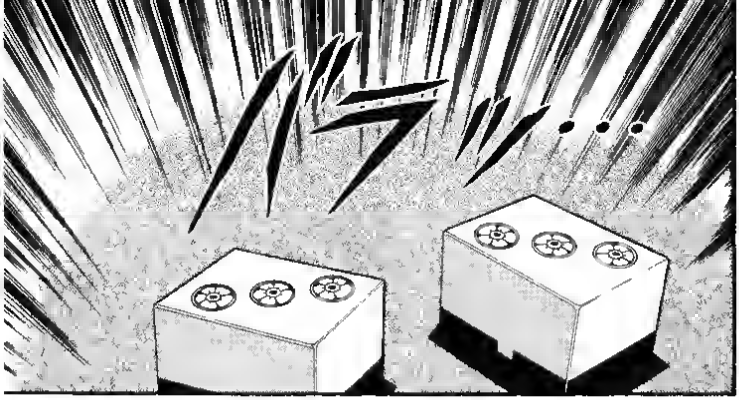
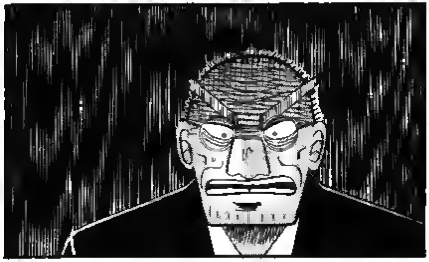
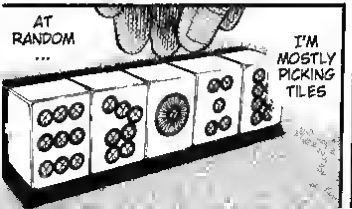

パラ…

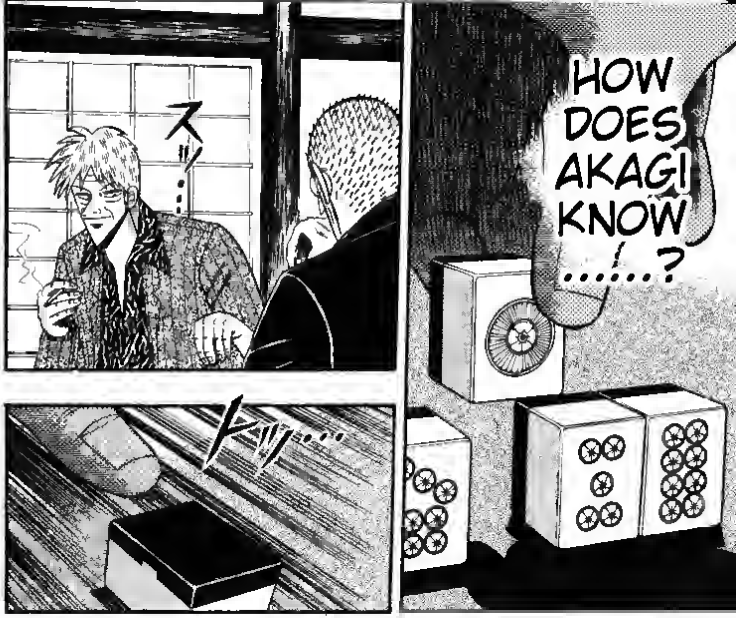
GH...!

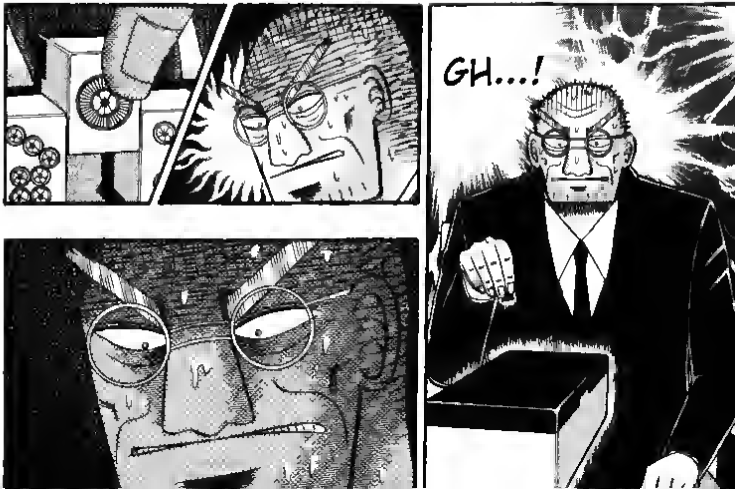


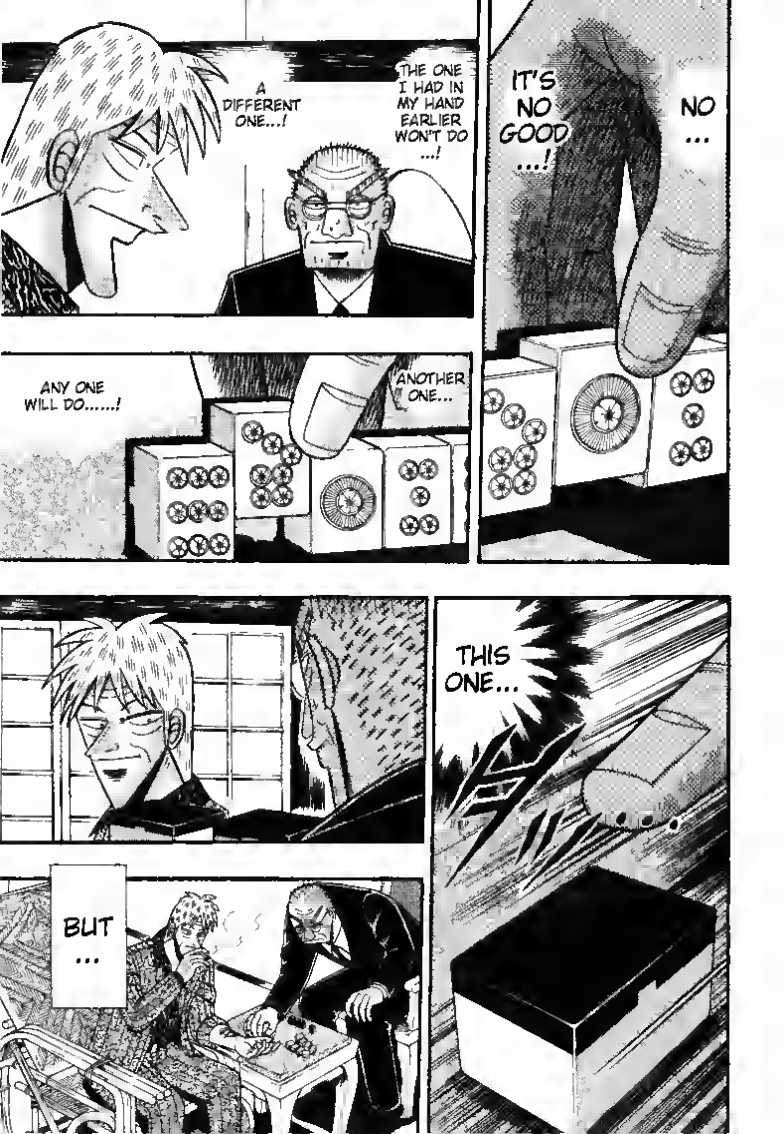
KH...!

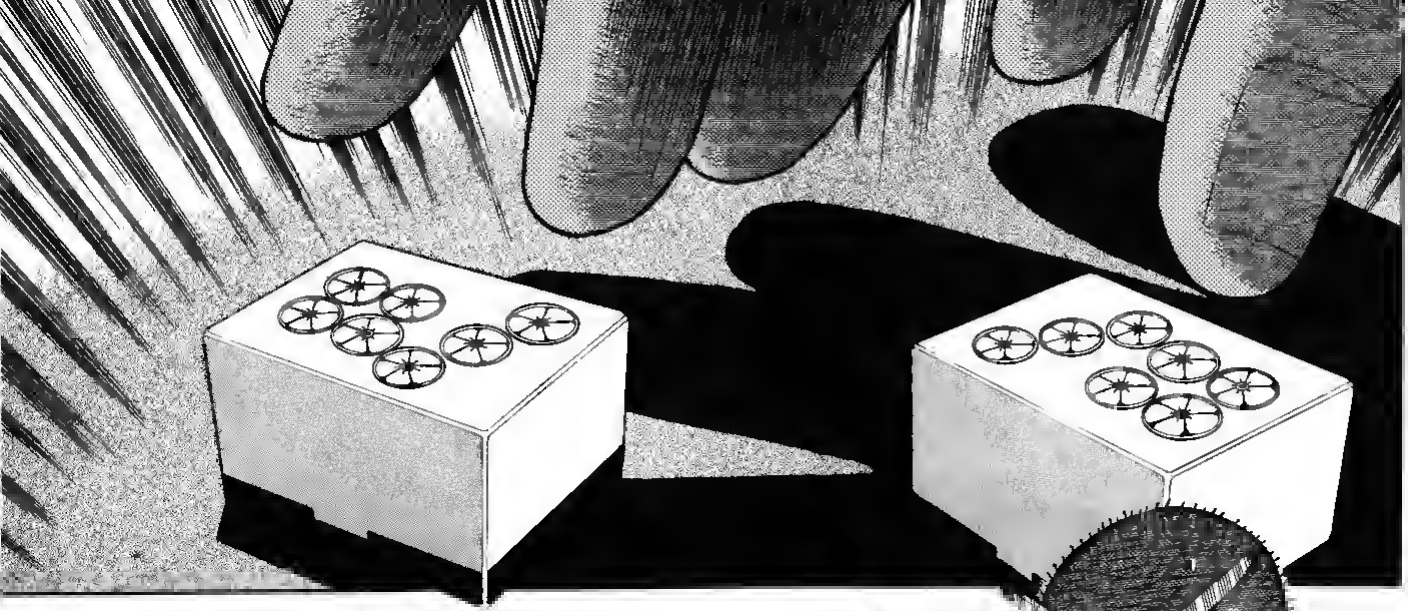

AT RANDOM ...
I'M MOSTLY PICKING TILES

IS HE DOING THIS .....?
HOW .....
HOW .....?

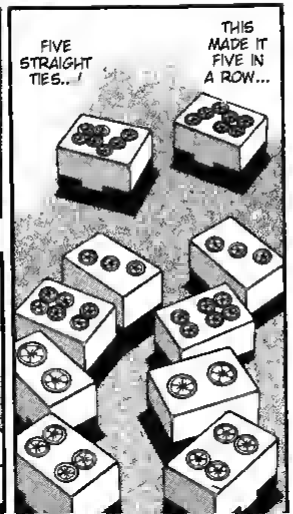

HOW DOES AKAGI KNOW ...!...?


GH...!

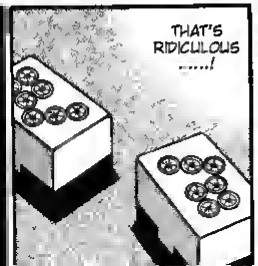

A DIFFERENT ONE...!
THE ONE I HAD IN MY HAND EARLIER WON'T DO ...!
IT'S NO GOOD ...!
NO ...
ANY ONE WILL DO.....!
ANOTHER ONE...
THIS ONE...
BUT ...

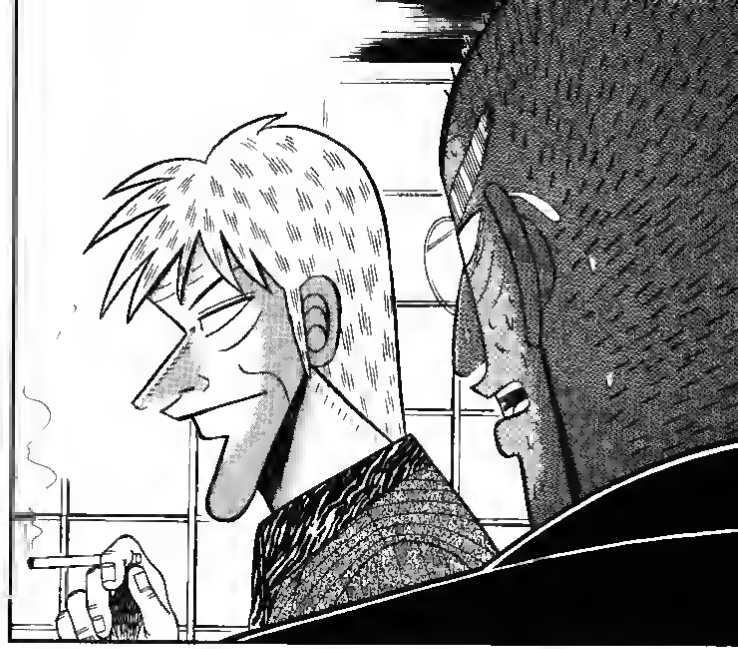


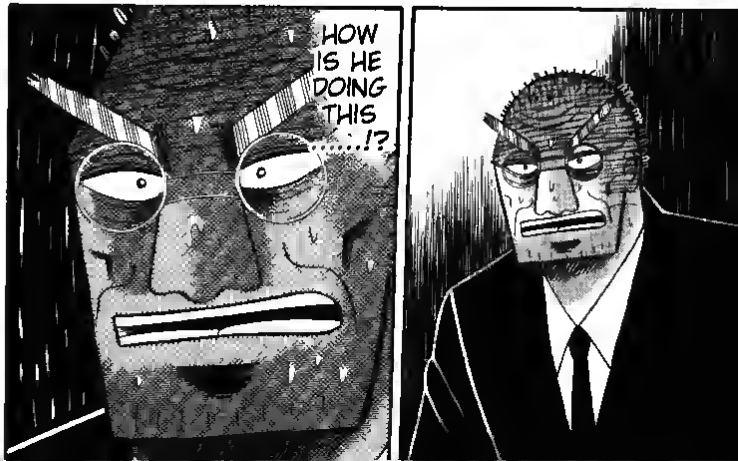
THEY WERE THE SAME AGAIN ...!

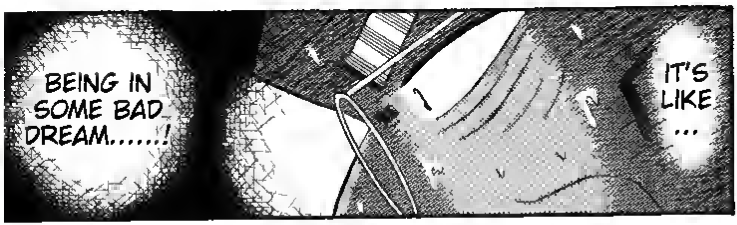


HOW...!?

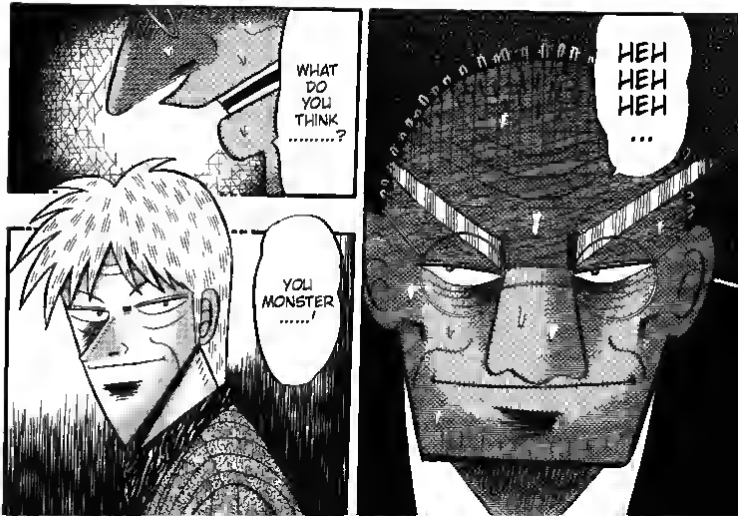





HOW IS HE DOING THIS.....!?


BEING IN SOME BAD DREAM.....!
IT'S LIKE ...

HEH HEH ...


WHAT DO YOU THINK.....?
YOU MONSTER.....!
HEH HEH HEH...

MAKES ME HAPPY ...
FIERCE COMPETITION LIKE THIS BETWEEN YOU AND I.
BUT...
HEH HEH HEH .....
IT'S A LUCKY BREAK ...
HAVE TO DIE...!
YOU DON'T
SO... IT'S NOT MUCH OF A REASON BUT...
.....
A MAN LIKE YOU BEFORE ...!
I'VE NEVER LAID EYES ON...

I JUST DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND ...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DIE ...!
HEH HEH HEH ..
THAT'S A KIND OF HAPPINESS, TOO...!
YES .....!
HEH HEH HEH ..
WITH WHAT CONCIOUS-NESS YOU HAVE LEFT ...!
ENJOY YOUR LIFE ...
CAN'T YOU JUST LET YOURSELF GO SENILE...?!
IT MEANS NOTHING .....!
IF I CAN'T PLAY A GAME .....
HAPPI-NESS LIKE THAT ...!
I DON'T NEED IT .....!
.....
JUST SIT BACK AND DRINK SOME TEA, YOU MEAN...?

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THE GAME…
YES…
MEANING-LESS……?

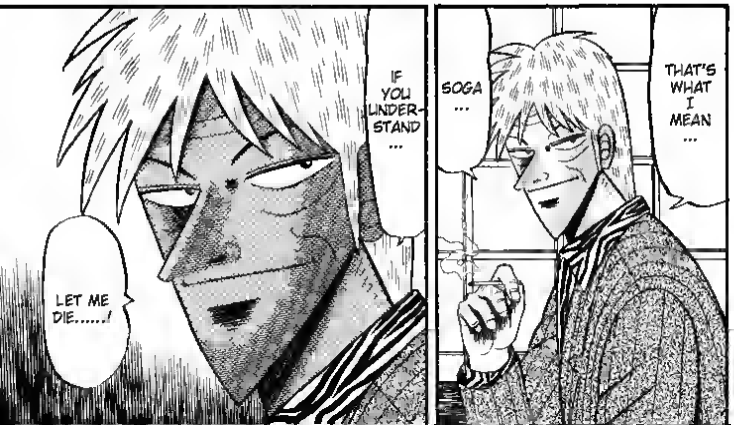
IS EVERYTHING IN LIFE...!
HEY ...!
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING ...!
THAT'S RIDICULOUS ...!

HEH HEH HEH ...
THERE'S ALL SORTS OF THINGS ...
WOMEN AND WINE, FRIENDS... FAMILY...
THERE'S OTHER THINGS TOO...
THAT'S NOT EVERYTHING .....!
THOSE THINGS ...
ARE ALL A BREAK ...!
A REST ...!
HUH ...?

AKAGI ...!
AH...
HEY...
THOSE THINGS ARE NOTHING MORE THAN A BREAK BETWEEN GAMES.....!
HEH HEH HEH ...
YOU'RE WRONG .....!
THAT...
I AM BIASED ...!
YES, IT IS ...!
THAT'S INCREDIBLY BIASED THINKING...!

IS THE ONLY THING...
THAT I'M PROUD TO HAVE LIVED FOR...!

HEH HEH HEH ...
AKAGI .....!


LET ME DIE.....!
IF YOU UNDER-STAND ...
SOGA ...
THAT'S WHAT I MEAN ...

THAT...
IS THE ONLY ROAD LEFT FOR ME...!

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CHAPTER 148
BEYOND HEAVEN

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AKAGI
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THE GAME IS EVERYTHING IN LIFE ……?

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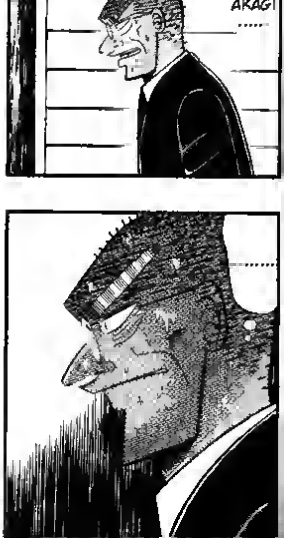
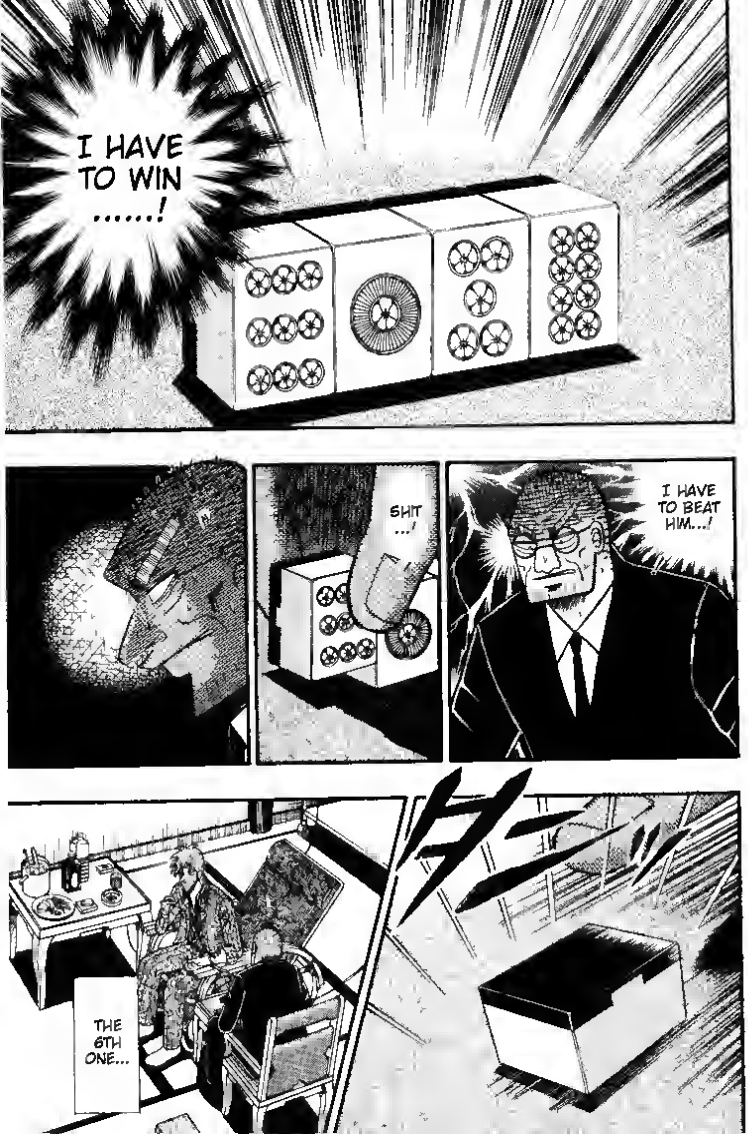
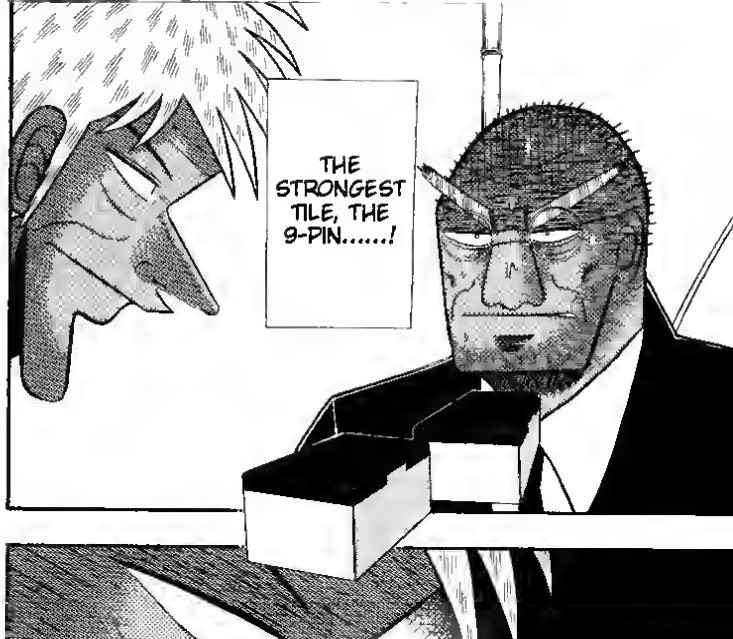

……

BUT
MAYBE ...
WHO WOULD EVER HAVE THAT IDEA...
HE'S BEING BIASED ...!
.....
THAT'S WHY AKAGI HAS THAT OPINION ...!?
HIS INHUMAN ABILITIES... AND INTUITION...
SHIT ..!

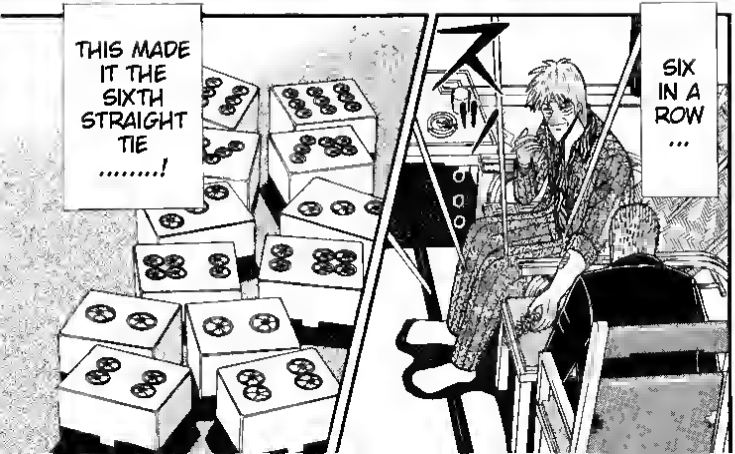
HE'S NOT PLANNING TO WIN...!
I HAVE TO BEAT HIM...!
BUT...
HIS DEATH ...!
I HAVE TO STOP IT...
IS IMPOSSIBLE ...!
I KNOW THAT PERSUADING THIS MAN
HE'LL DIE IF IT KEEPS GOING LIKE THIS.....!


I HAVE TO WIN .....!
SHIT ...!
I HAVE TO BEAT HIM...!
THE 6TH ONE...

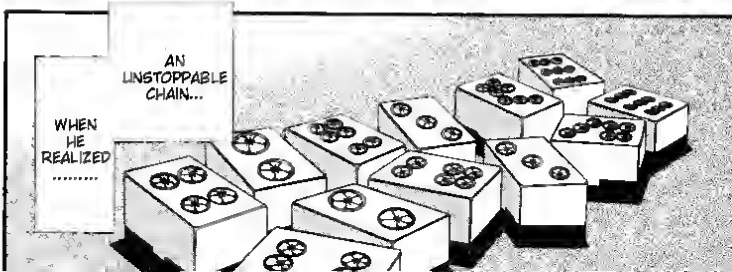

THE STRONGEST TILE, THE 9-PIN.....!

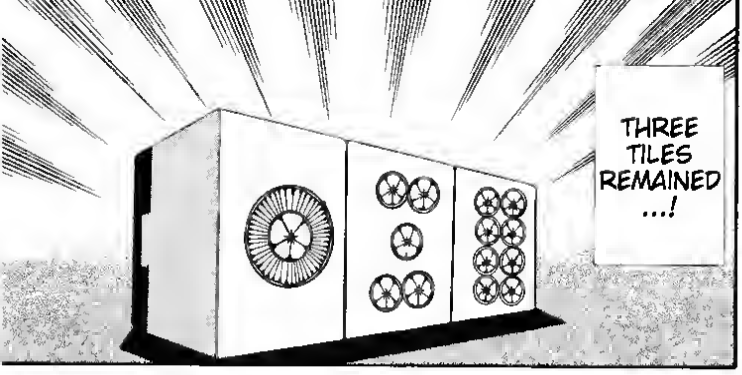
BUT ...

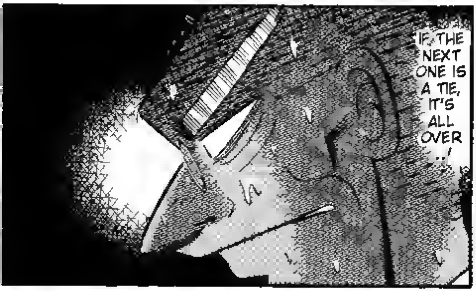
TIED AGAIN ...!
GH...!

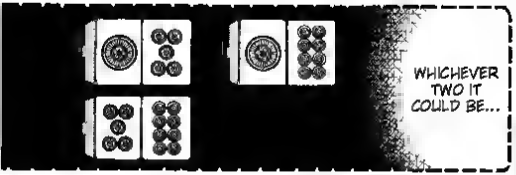

THIS MADE IT THE SIXTH STRAIGHT TIE .....!
SIX IN A ROW ...

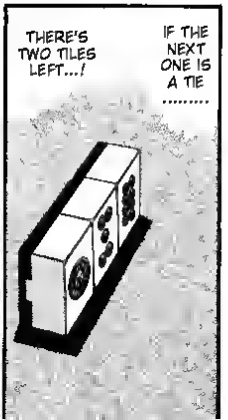
GNGH ...!
THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO...
THE TIES CONTIN-UED...!

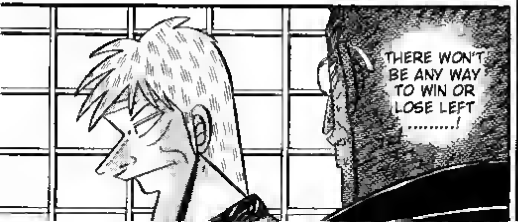

AN UNSTOPPABLE CHAIN...
WHEN HE REALIZED .....

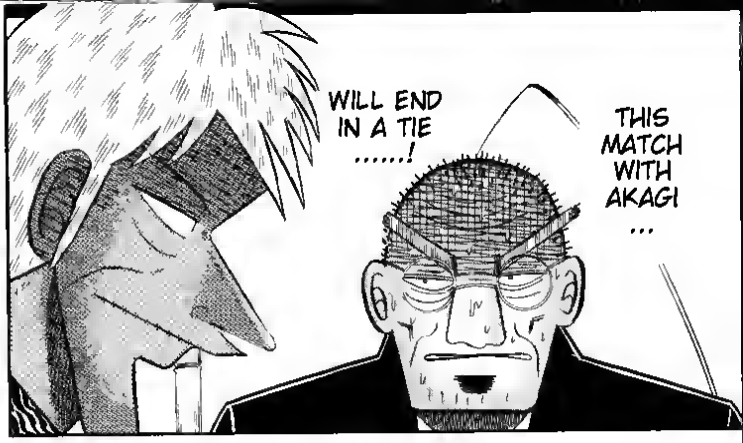

THREE TILES REMAINED ...!

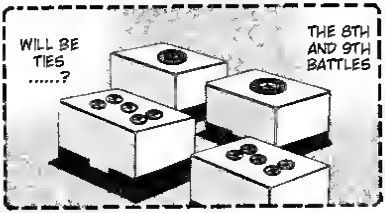

IF THE NEXT ONE IS A TIE, IT'S ALL OVER ...!

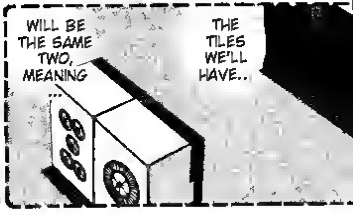

WHICHEVER TWO IT COULD BE...

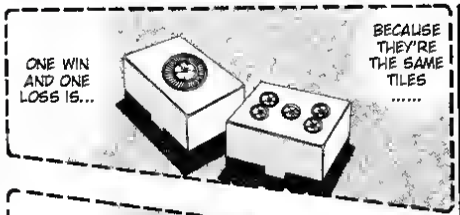

THERE'S TWO TILES LEFT...!
IF THE NEXT ONE IS A TIE .....

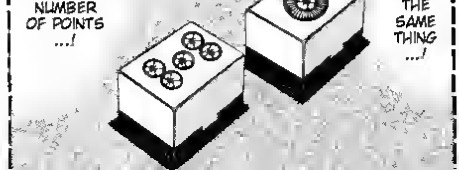

THERE WON'T BE ANY WAY TO WIN OR LOSE LEFT .....!


WILL END IN A TIE .....!
THIS MATCH WITH AKAGI ...

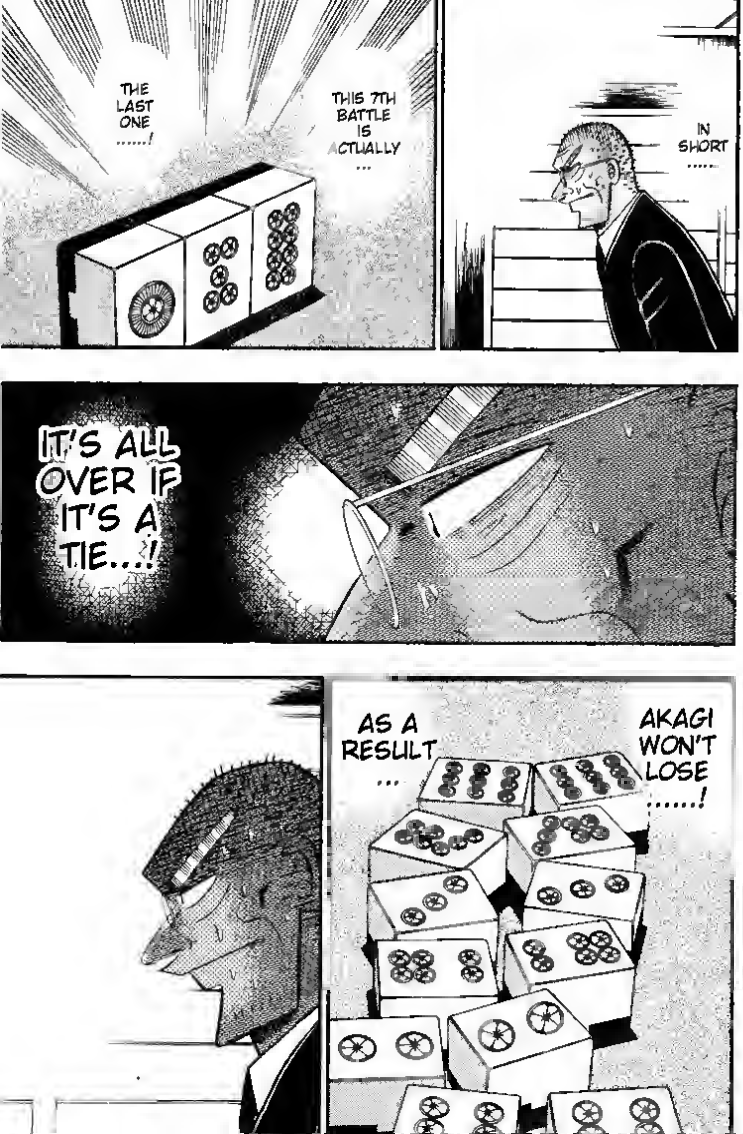

WILL BE TIES .....?
THE 8TH AND 9TH BATTLES

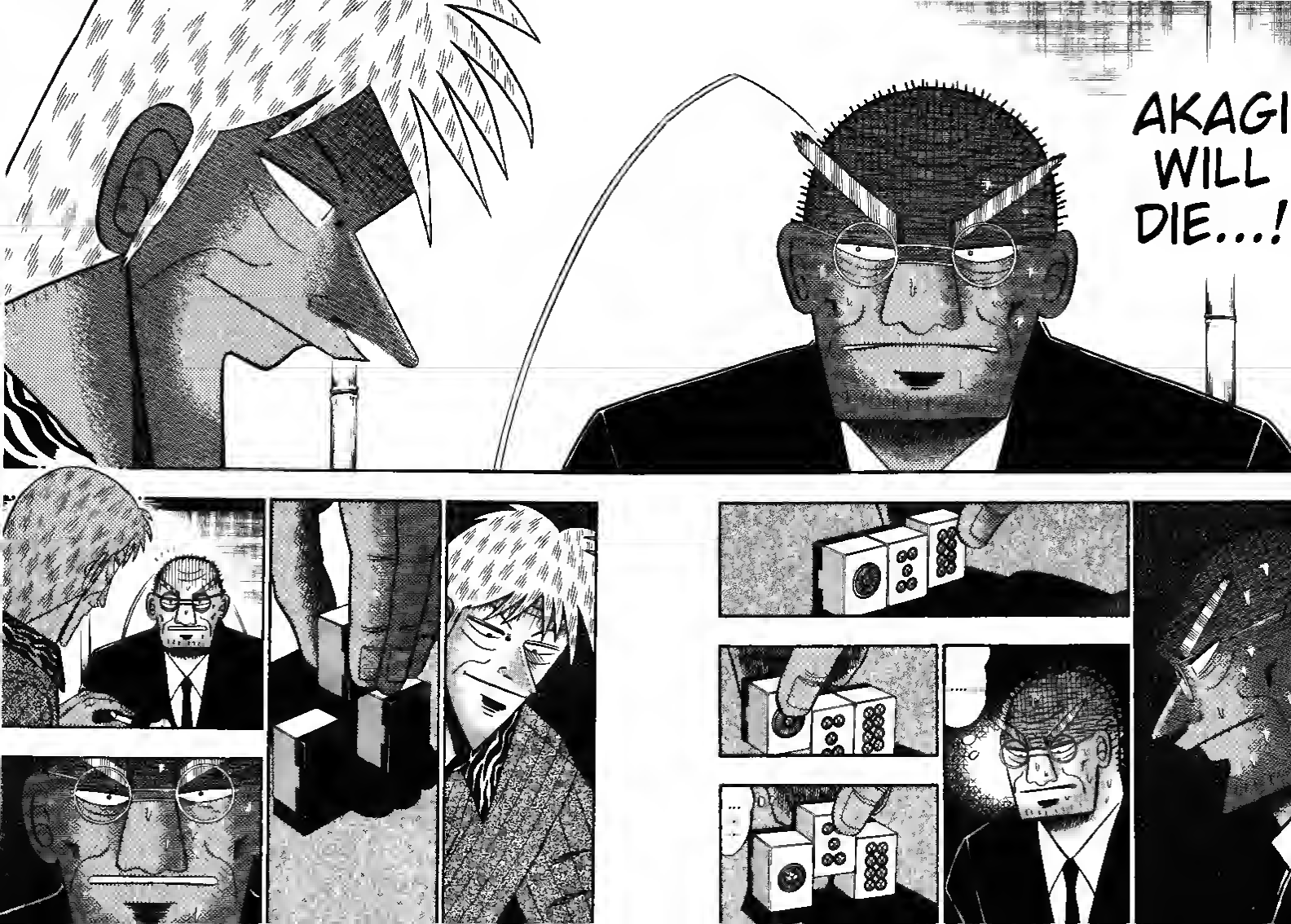

WILL BE THE SAME TWO, MEANING ...
THE TILES WE'LL HAVE..

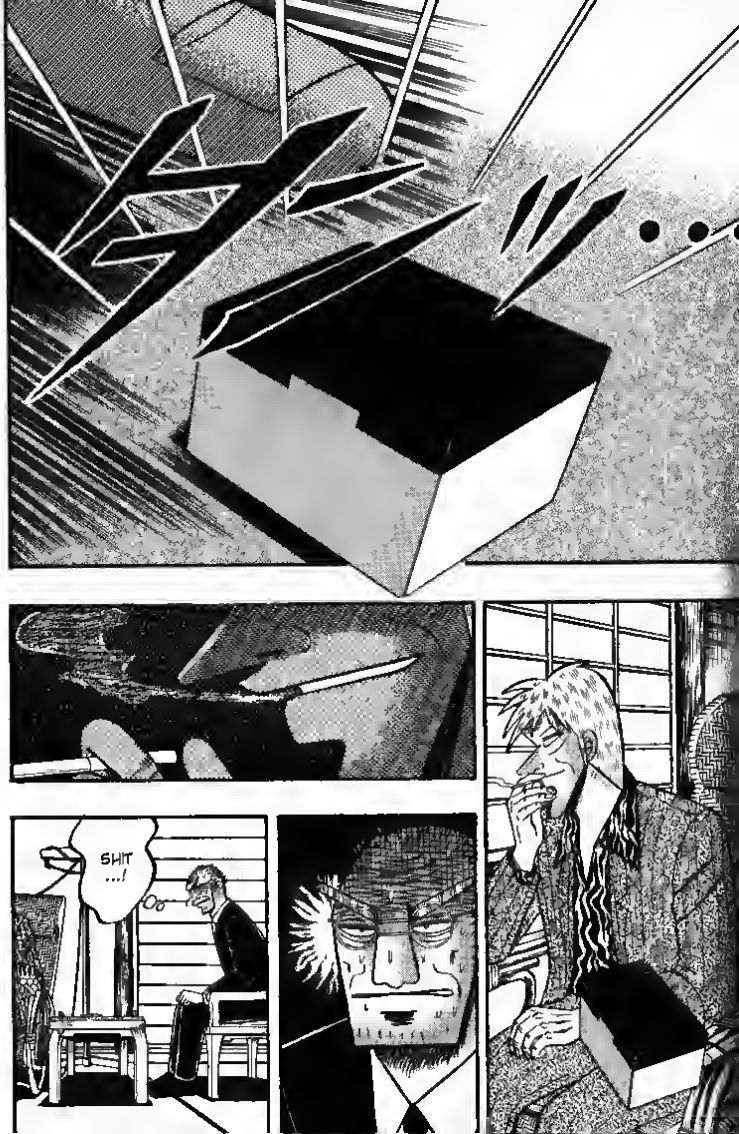

ONE WIN AND ONE LOSS IS...
BECAUSE THEY'RE THE SAME TILES .....

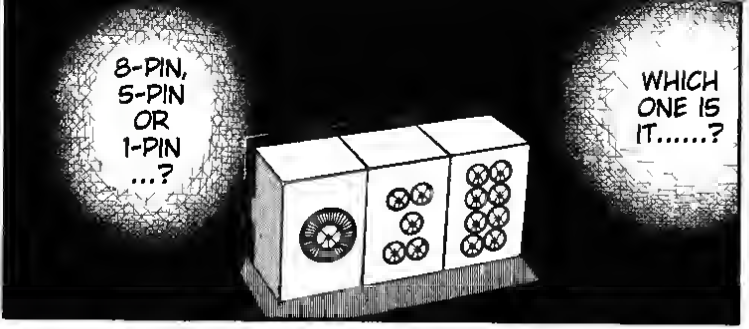

THE SAME NUMBER OF POINTS ...!
THE SAME THING ...!

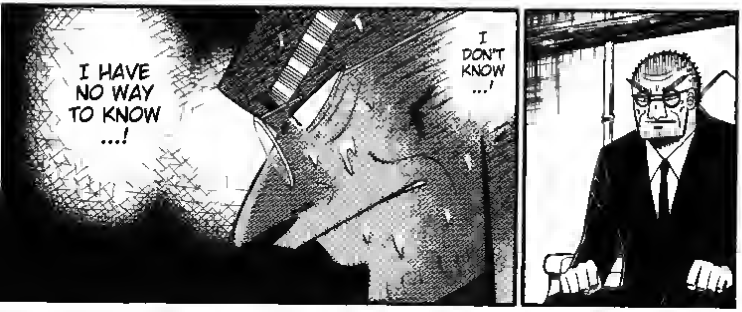
ONLY ONE WIN AND ONE LOSS, BUT ...
OR .....

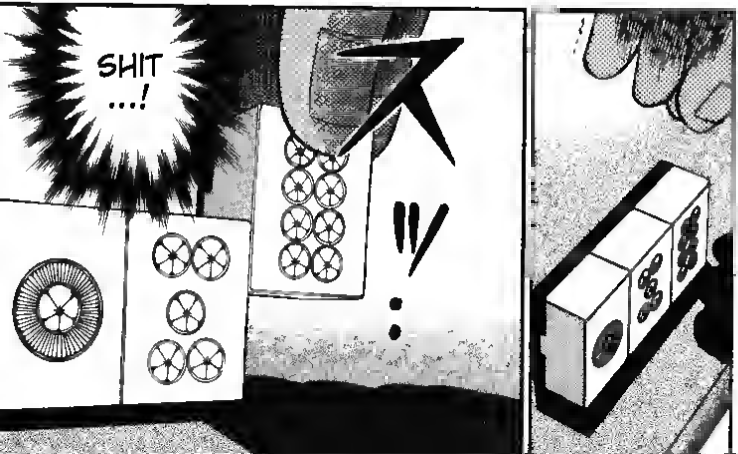

THE LAST ONE .....!
THIS 7TH BATTLE IS ACTUALLY ...
IN SHORT .....
IT'S ALL OVER IF IT'S A TIE...!
AS A RESULT ...
AKAGI WON'T LOSE .....!

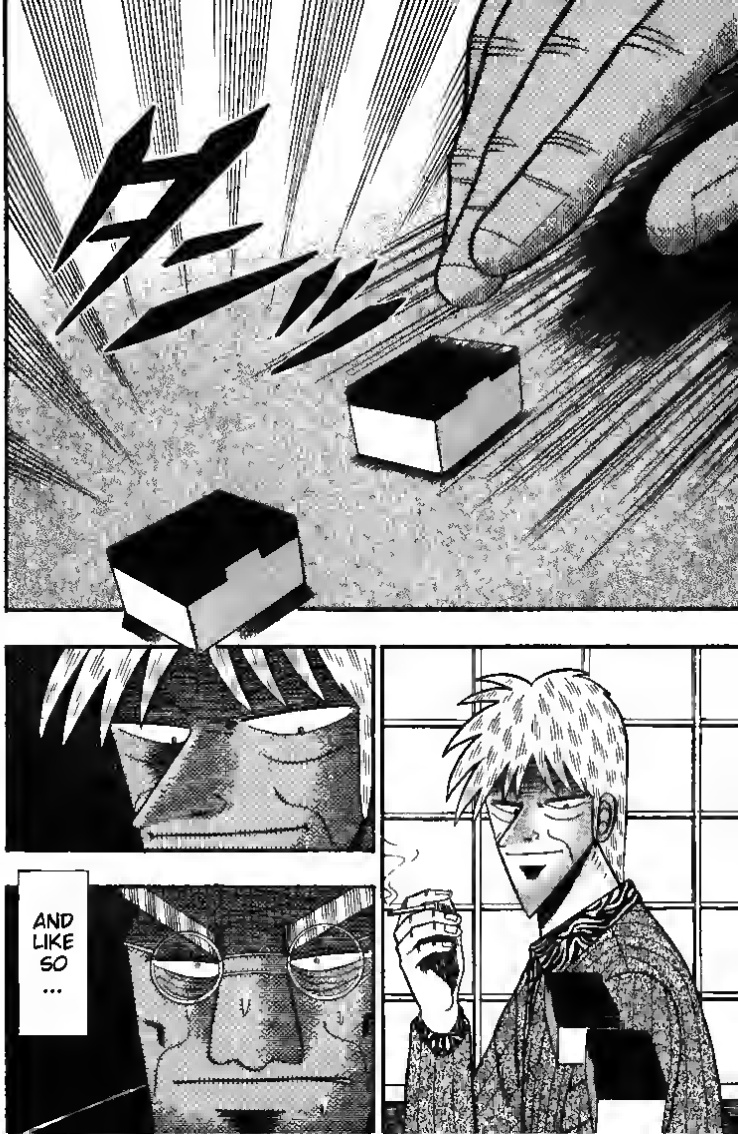

AKAGI WILL DIE...!

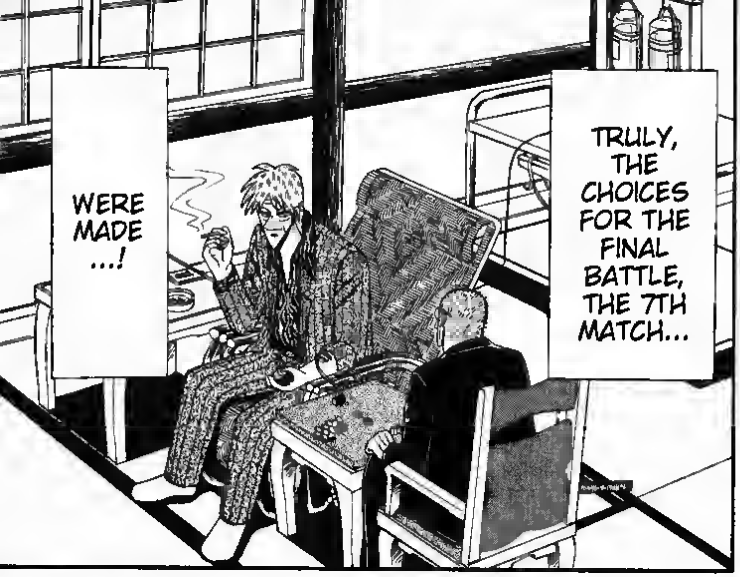

SHIT ...!

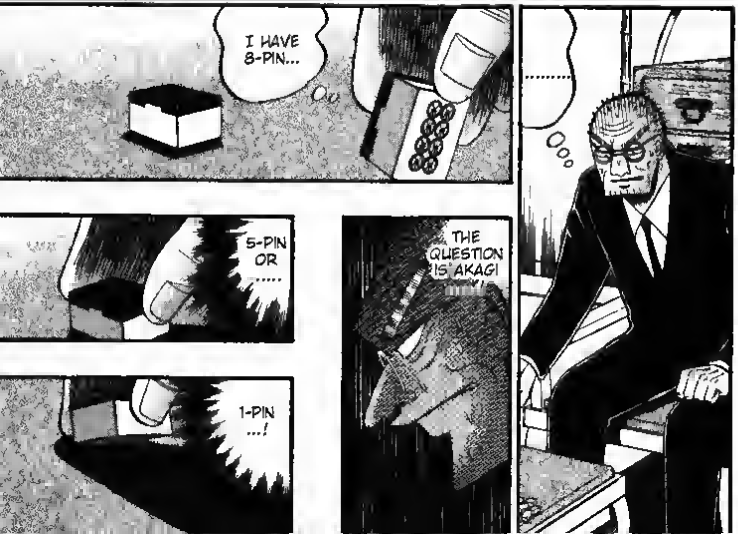

8-PIN, 5-PIN OR 1-PIN ...?
WHICH ONE IS IT.....?

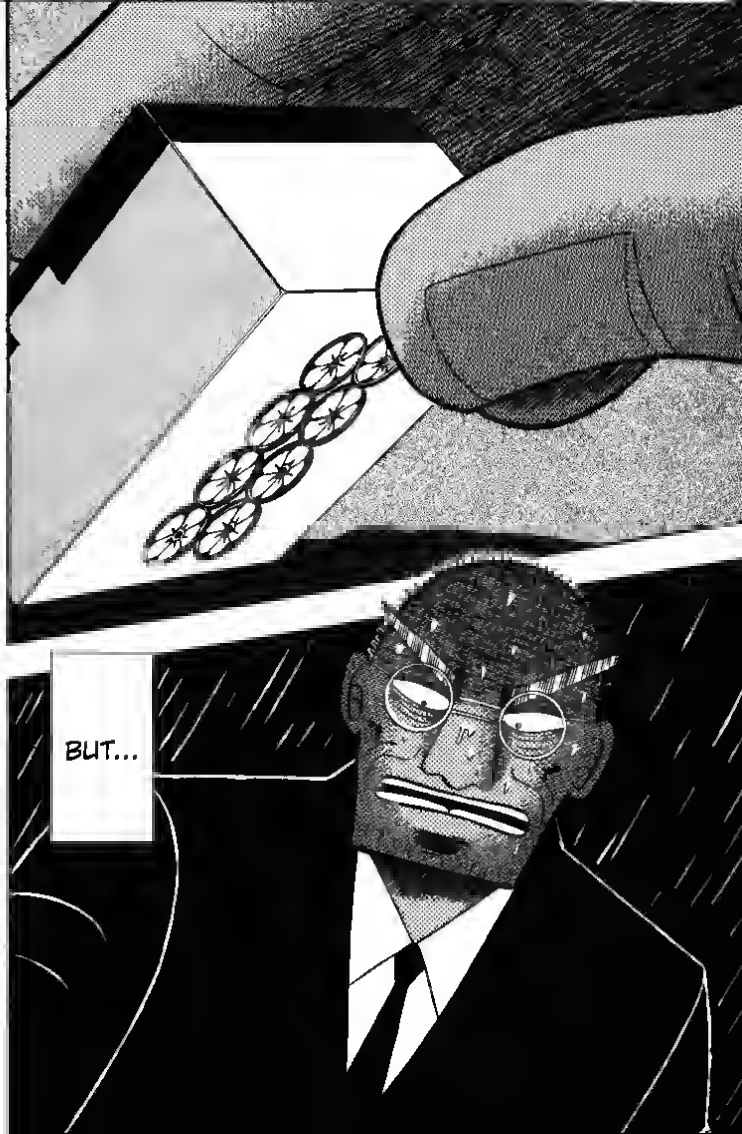

I HAVE NO WAY TO KNOW ...!
I DON'T KNOW ...!

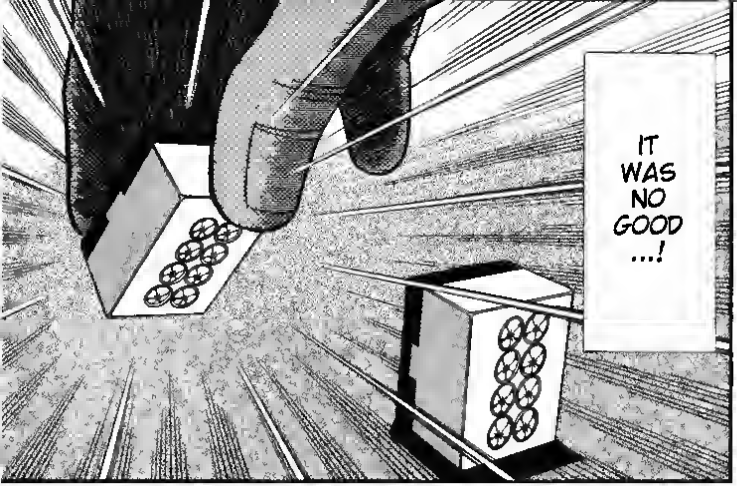

SHIT ...!
!!


AND LIKE SO ...


TRULY, THE CHOICES FOR THE FINAL BATTLE, THE 7TH MATCH...
WERE MADE ...!


I HAVE 8-PIN...
Ou
5-PIN OR .....
1-PIN ...!
THE QUESTION IS AKAGI Y!
.....
Ooo

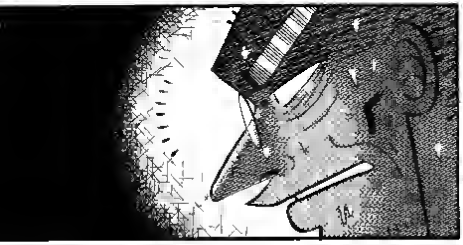

BUT...

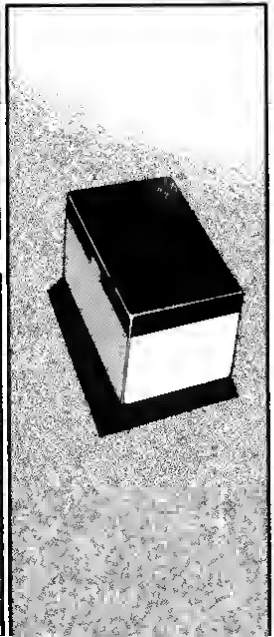

IT WAS NO GOOD ...!

GH ...!
A TIE ...!

THE 7TH TIE IN A ROW ...!

IT'S OVER .....!
NOW, EITHER WAY .....
IT'S A TIE .....!
IN THE END...
I COULDN'T STOP HIM .....
AKAGI .....!





HUH ...!?

WHAT ...!?

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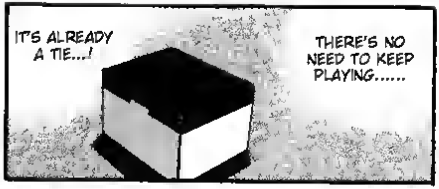
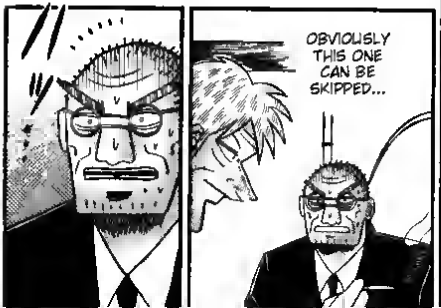
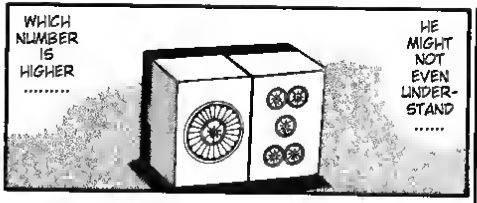

IT'S ALREADY A TIE...!
THERE'S NO NEED TO KEEP PLAYING.....

WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS...?

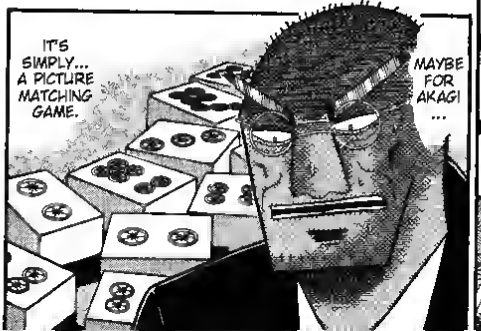

OBVIOUSLY THIS ONE CAN BE SKIPPED...

HIS ALZHEIMERS HAS ALREADY ENTERED THE INTERMEDIATE STAGES...
AKAGI'S DAILY ACTIVITIES ARE UNCHANGED, BUT...
HE'S LOST A NUMBER OF ABILITIES ...!
AT FIRST GLANCE
HE CAN'T COMPREHEND IT...
EVEN IF IT'S SIMPLE, IT'S NO USE...
THE ABILITY TO DO MATH...
FOR EXAMPLE .....
HE DOESN'T KNOW ...?
IN OTHER WORDS ..

THAT BY THE 7TH BATTLE... IT'S ALREADY A TIE .....!


WHICH NUMBER IS HIGHER .....
HE MIGHT NOT EVEN UNDER-STAND .....

..... IN FACT ...

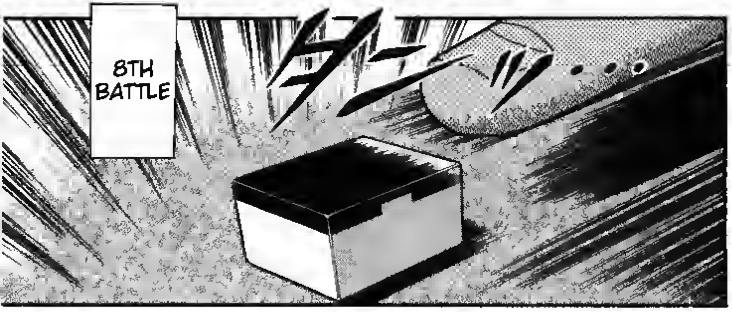

IT'S SIMPLY... A PICTURE MATCHING GAME.
MAYBE FOR AKAGI ...

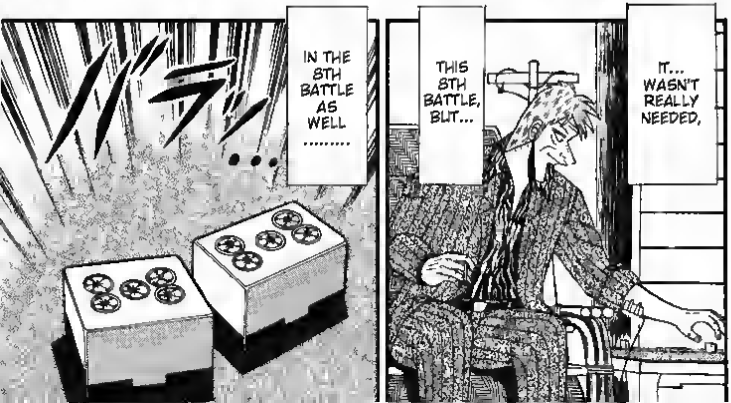
THAT'S ALL HE UNDERSTANDS ...?
MAYBE ....
THE MATCH WILL BE A TIE...
IF HE MATCHES UP THE SAME TILE 9 TIMES

GH...!

.....
AKAGI ...!
WHAT'S WRONG .....?

NOTHING


8TH BATTLE


IN THE 8TH BATTLE AS WELL .....
THIS 8TH BATTLE, BUT...
IT... WASN'T REALLY NEEDED,

A TIE .....!

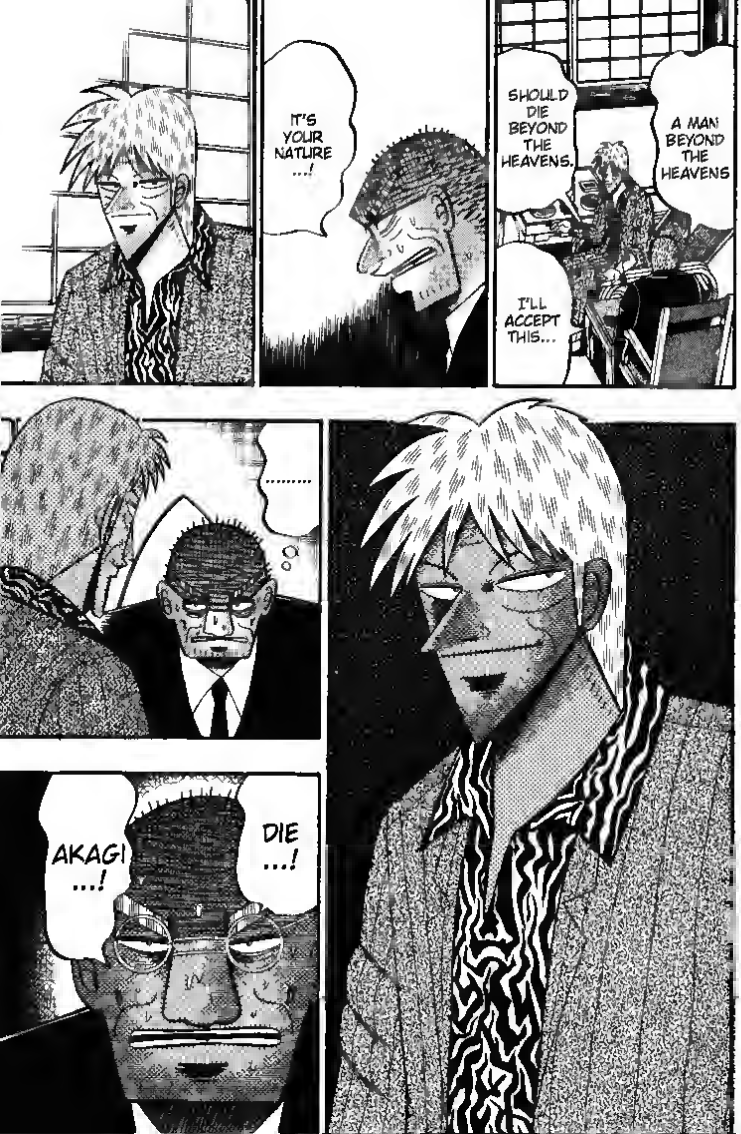
THEN...
YEAH...
IT'S OVER, THEN .....?
NO...
.....
TO PUT...
NO NEED
THIS ONE OUT ...!
NOPE...

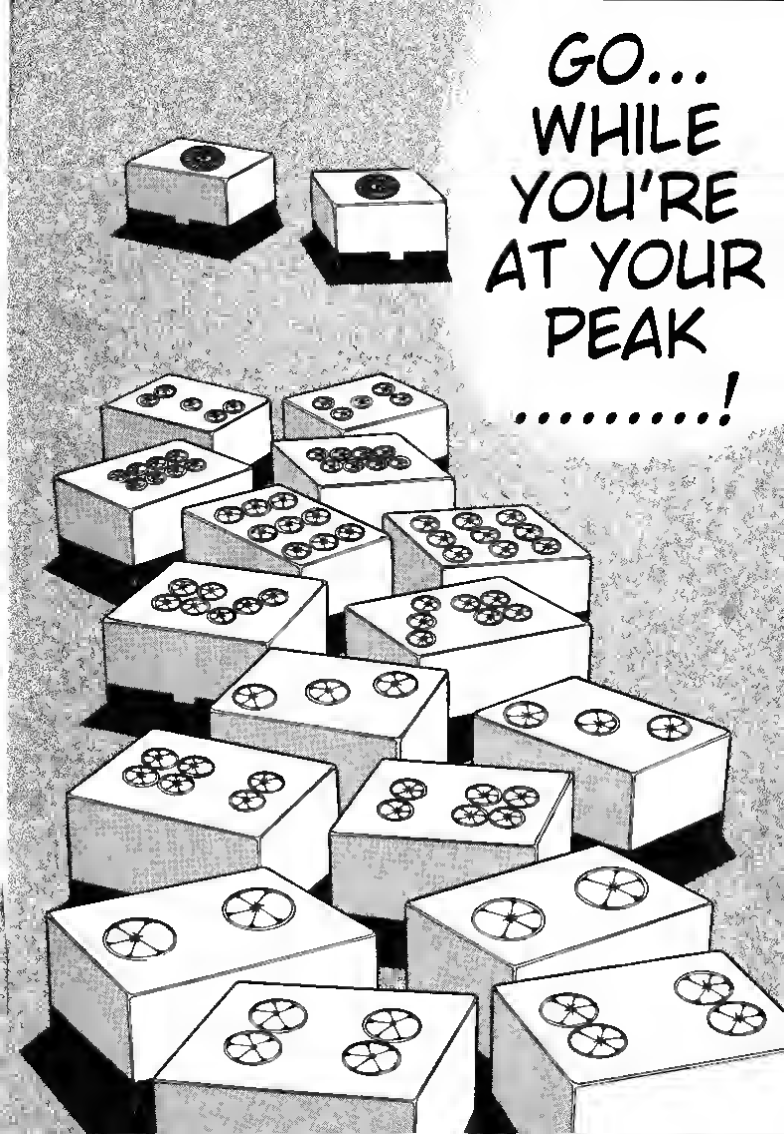
SHOULDN'T WE TAKE IT ALL THE WAY TO THE END?
AFTER ALL THIS EFFORT
WELL, IT'S TRUE, BUT...
HUH ...?
AND OF COURSE
MY 1-PIN
THE 9TH MATCH ...
NOW ALL NINE MATCHES WERE TIED...!
YOU HAVE 1-PIN TOO.
HAVE YOU EVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE ...?
.....
LOOK .....!

NOBODY ELSE COULD EVER COMPREHEND .....
..... THIS SORT OF THING .....
THIS ...!
NOT EVEN ONE IN A MILLION COULD DO IT...
IT'S A WORLD THAT'S ONLY FOR YOU ...!
AKAGI ...

YOU ...
CAN DIE ...!

ゴクッ…
HEH HEH HEH …
YES…
ROTTING AWAY…
ISN'T FITTING FOR YOU AT ALL.
TO US AVERAGE PEOPLE…
YOU'RE A PERSON WHO LIVED HIS LIFE
WITH LOGIC AND INTUITION FAR BEYOND OURS…
A MAN BEYOND HEAVEN……!


IT'S YOUR NATURE ...!
A MAN BEYOND THE HEAVENS
SHOULD DIE BEYOND THE HEAVENS.
I'LL ACCEPT THIS...
.....
AKAGI ...!
DIE ...!


GO...
WHILE
YOU'RE
AT YOUR
PEAK
.....!

天
CHAPTER 149
FUNCTIONAL BEAUTY

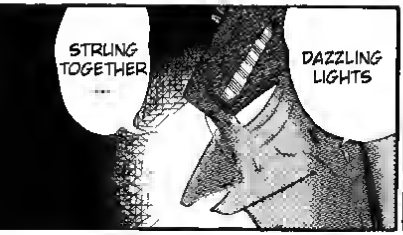
ギ…

SIR...
.....
ARE YOU OKAY...?
HEH HEH HEH ...
I'M FINE, BUT...
I'M OKAY ...
NOTHING EVER TURNS OUT LIKE WE PLAN...!

AKAGI WILL DIE...!
HEH HEH HEH ...
.....
I'M ALMOST POSITIVE HE'LL DIE..!
... ...
AND THAT WILL OF HIS ...!
PROBABLY NOBODY CAN STOP HIM...
AH...

IT'S WRONG, ISN'T IT...
SURPRISINGLY STILL KICKING AROUND...
WHILE AKAGI DIES.....
IS ALIVE, GROWING OLD...
THAT SOME-ONE LIKE ME
BUT...
HEH HEH...
...
...
...

IT WAS DONE SO BEAUTIFULLY .....
WHAT HE DID EARLIER .....!


STRUNG TOGETHER ...
DAZZLING LIGHTS

HEH HEH ...
HUH ...?

I'M...
...? ...

THE MILKY WAY...!
JUST LIKE .....

TALKING ABOUT AKAGI'S GIFT ...!

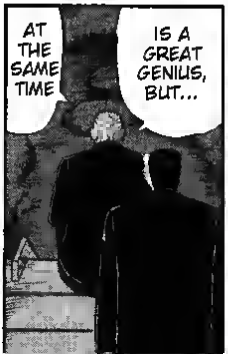
I WAS SHOWN A MIRACLE ...
NOT LONG AGO ...!

CAN YOU BELIEVE IT.....?
YEAH ...
A MIRACLE .....?
... ...
WHEN WE PLAYED "9" .....
IT WAS COMPLETELY TIED...!
WHAT ...?
HEH HEH HEH ...

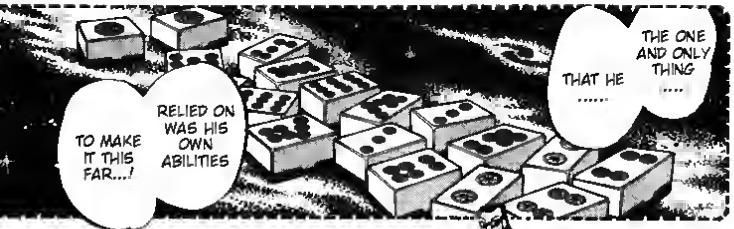
AKAGI ...
THAT DEATH SUITS AKAGI ...!

I'M GLAD...

HE HAS FAILINGS TOO...!
AS A MEMBER OF SOCIETY


AT THE SAME TIME
IS A GREAT GENIUS, BUT...

HE'S A MAN WHO COULD NEVER LIVE A NORMAL LIFE.....!


THE ONE AND ONLY THING .....
THAT HE .....
RELIED ON WAS HIS OWN ABILITIES
TO MAKE IT THIS FAR...!

SO...
ONCE HE'S LOST THAT .....
HE'S ALREADY DEAD .....!

.....
"HE SHOULD GO WHILE HE'S AT HIS PEAK..."
EARLIER .....
HEH HEH ...
FOR HIM...
IT FEELS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT ...!
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, BUT...
PROBABLY FOR AKAGI...
MAYBE JUST BARELY ABLE TO MAKE A STAND ...!
HE'S ON HIS LAST LEGS.

HE WANTS TO DIE ...!
WHEN HIS ABILITIES HAVE FAILED HIM...
THE SAME AS AN ANIMAL ...!
.....
ANY OF THEM .....
A TIGER OR BEAR..... EAGLE...
THE KING OF THE RAPTORS ...
THE EAGLE ...!
FOR EXAM-PLE...
TO SUPPORT THEIR LIVES ...
RELY ON THE ABILITIES THEY EXCEL AT
ALL ANIMALS ...

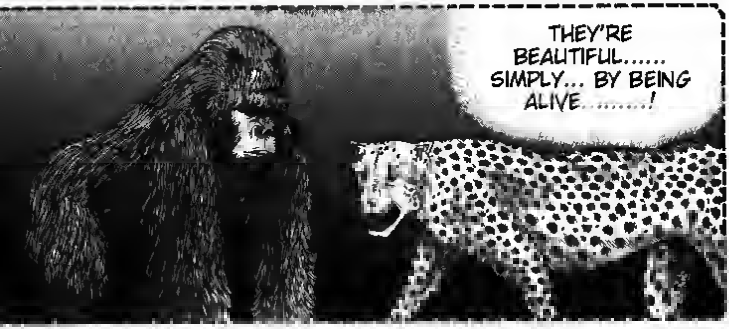
THE EAGLE, WITH WINGS TO SOAR THROUGH THE HEAVENS...

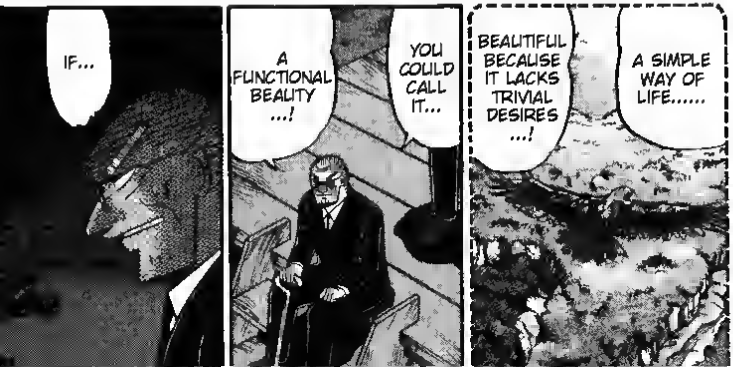
THROUGH THOSE THINGS...
A BEAK.....!

TALONS TO TEAR APART PREY...!

IN SHORT.....
IT SUPPORTS ITS LIFE.....!

WILD ANIMALS .....
AND THERE-FORE
TALENT IS "LIFE" ...!
ABILITY ...


THEY'RE BEAUTIFUL..... SIMPLY... BY BEING ALIVE.....!


IF...
A FUNCTIONAL BEAUTY ...!
YOU COULD CALL IT...
BEAUTIFUL BECAUSE IT LACKS TRIVIAL DESIRES ...!
A SIMPLE WAY OF LIFE.....

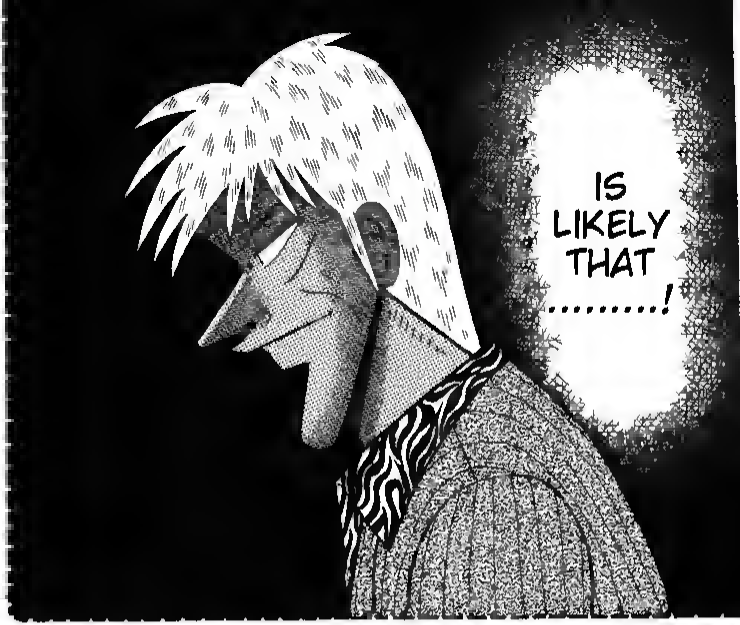
THAT SHRED APART ITS PREY ...
LOSES THE TALONS AND BEAK ...
JUST ...
AN EAGLE LOSES ITS WINGS...
IF THAT'S WHAT BECOMES OF IT...
STUMBLING AROUND...
AT LEAST AS FAR AS LIVING CREATURES GO, IT'S NOT AN EAGLE...!
IT ISN'T A MATTER OF DNA...
IS THAT STILL AN EAGLE.....?

IF IT HAD THAT ABILITY ...
IF THAT EAGLE COULD FORM WORDS
PROB-ABLY ...
IT'S LOST ITS BEAUTY ...!
WOULDN'T IT SAY "ENOUGH..." ...?
"KILL ME" .....!

NATURE IS UNFORGIVING.
OF COURSE ...

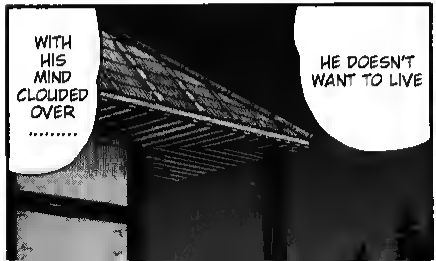
HEH HEH HEH ...

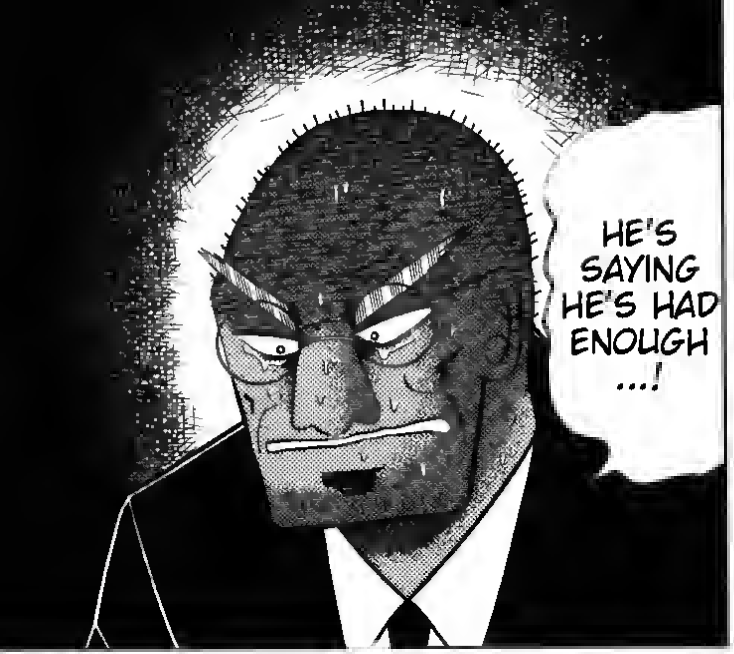
MOTHER NATURE TAKES ...!
THAT'S THE FORM...
SOMEONE COMES TO HAVE A TASTE ...
IN LESS THAN THREE DAYS
AND TEARS HIM APART .....!
IT MAY SEEM CRUEL, BUT...
AT FIRST GLANCE ...
STAYING ALIVE WHEN IT'S LOST ITS ABILITIES
IS FAR MORE CRUEL...!
WHAT AKAGI IS TRYING TO DO.....
SALVATION FOR A LIVING CREATURE .....!
DYING IS...

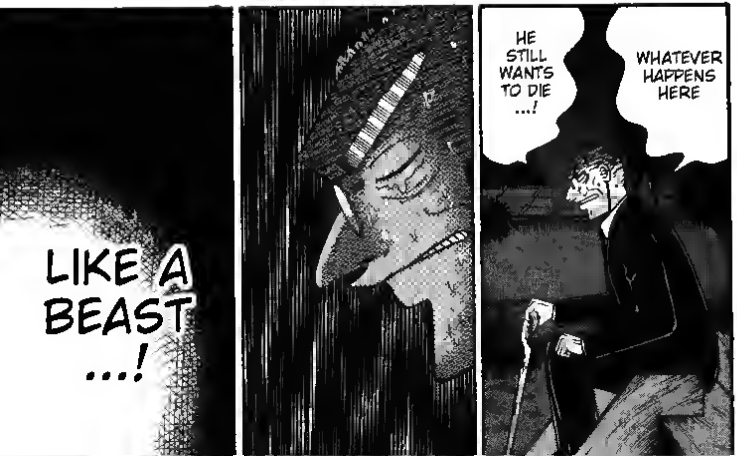

IS LIKELY THAT .....!

WHEN HIS MIND IS DONE FOR...
WHEN HIS ABILITIES AS A PERSON

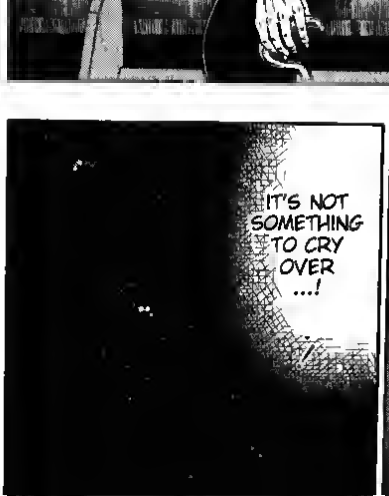
IN SHORT ...


WITH HIS MIND CLOUDED OVER .....
HE DOESN'T WANT TO LIVE

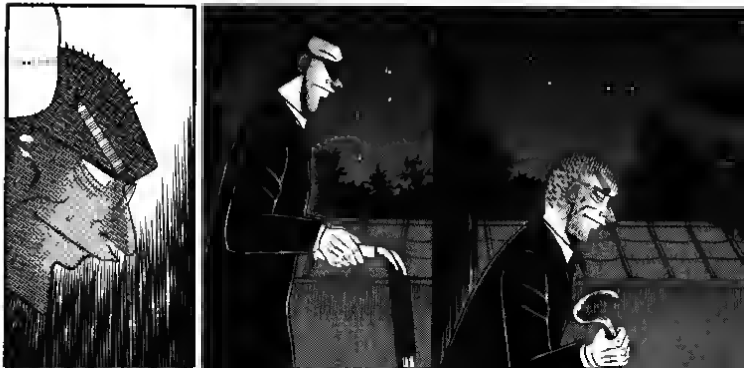

HE'S SAYING HE'S HAD ENOUGH ...!


WHATEVER HAPPENS HERE
HE STILL WANTS TO DIE ...!
LIKE A BEAST ...!

HE WANTS TO ROT AWAY .....!


IT'S NOT SOMETHING TO CRY OVER ...!

FOR AKAGI ...!
THIS DEATH IS INEVITABLE ...
YES SIR ...!
I GUESS WE'LL GO ...
.....



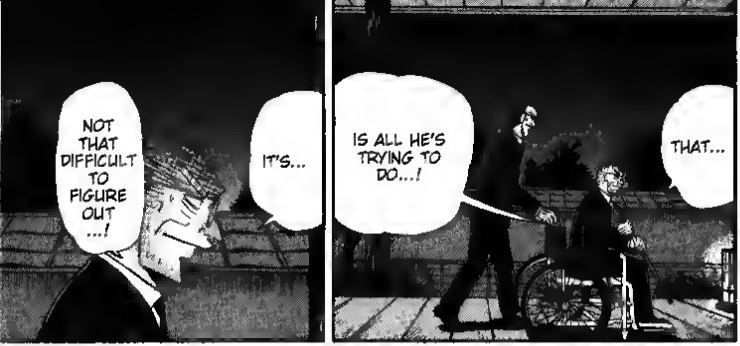
.....
HUH ...?
I SUPPOSE IT'S FINE .....
EVEN IF HE DECIDES HE DOESN'T NEED IT, THAT'S FINE ...!
HE DOESN'T HAVE TO KEEP ON LIVING ...!
THAT ILLUSION ...
YEAH ...
..... I GUESS SO .....

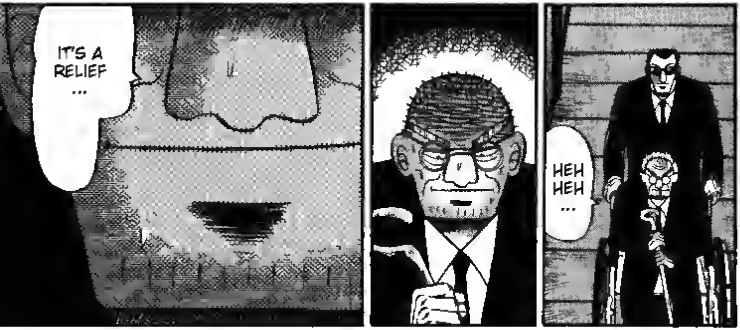
IS WHAT SO MANY PEOPLE SUFFER UNDER...!

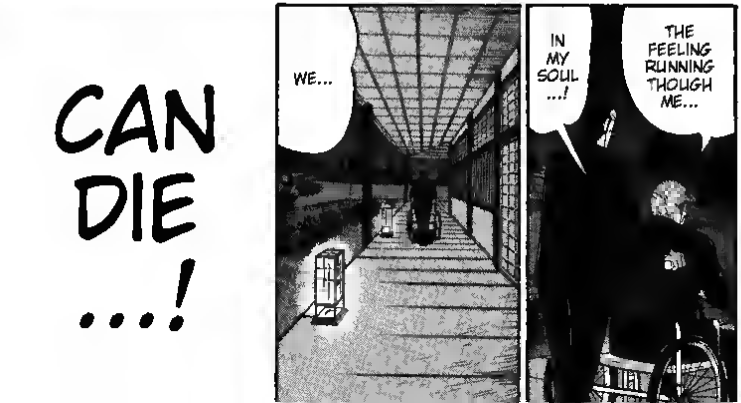
IF THEY CAN...

AKAGI .....
ゴロ

AND DIE FREELY .....!
PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE FREELY ...
ゴロ...
ゴロ..


NOT THAT DIFFICULT TO FIGURE OUT ...!
IT'S...
IS ALL HE'S TRYING TO DO...!
THAT...


IT'S A RELIEF ...
HEH HEH ...

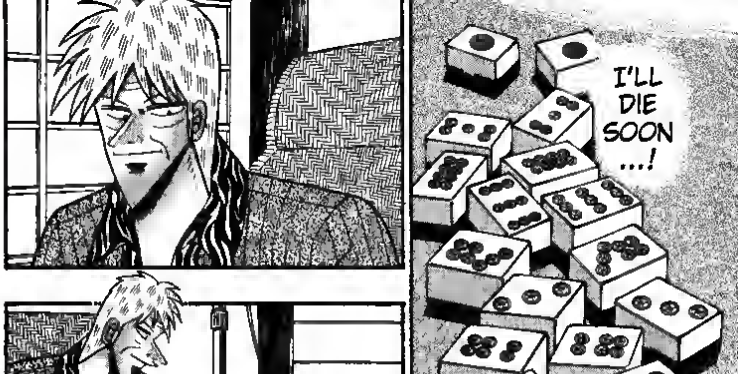

CAN DIE ...!
WE...
IN MY SOUL ...!
THE FEELING RUNNING THOUGH ME...

WE'LL DIE... WHEN OUR TIME IS UP .....!
IT'S NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF...!

CHAPTER 150
ABDUCTION

FOR THEIR LAST MEETING WITH AKAGI ...
NOW ...
SOGA, LEFT ...
THERE WERE THREE PEOPLE LEFT...!
THE 5TH ONE ...
カラ...

HARADA ...!
TEN... HIROYUKI...


I'LL DIE SOON ...!

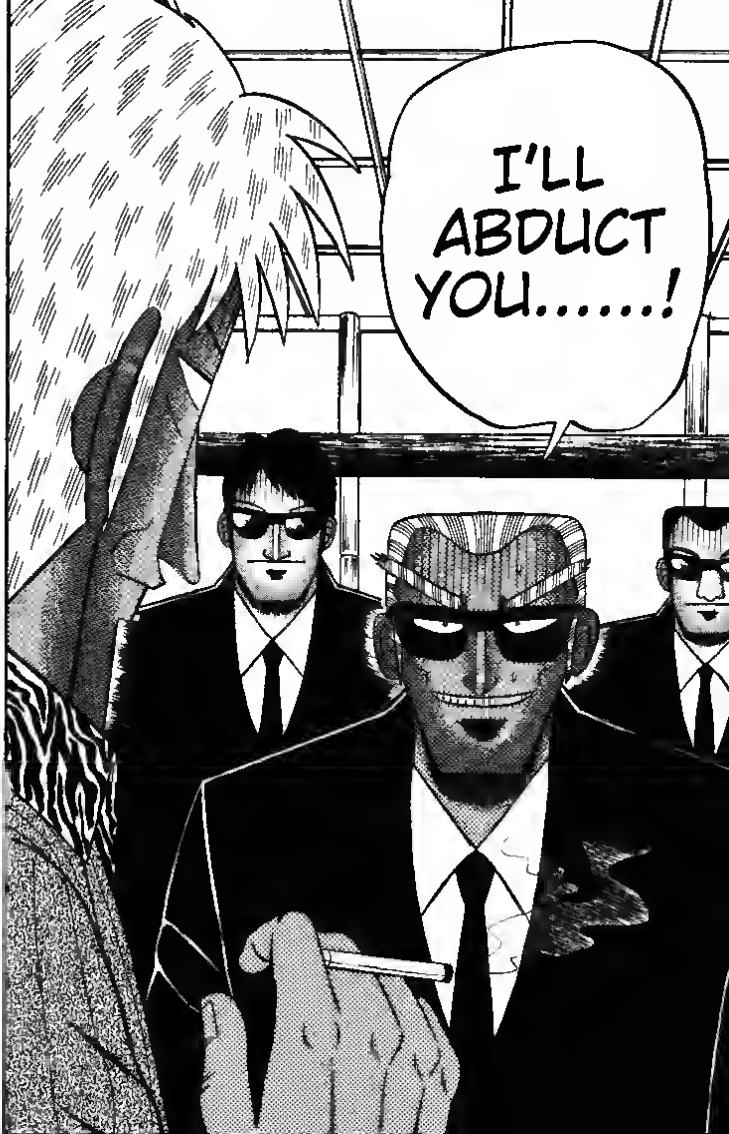
I CAN DIE .....!

ガタッ…

HEH HEH HEH ...
..... JUST LIKE I FIGURED .....
IT'S TOO LATE TO TURN BACK NOW, HUH...!
OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS, YOUR OWN REPUTATION, AND SO ON ...
YOU NEVER CARED ABOUT THOSE THAT .....
AKAGI ...!
THE 6TH ONE WAS ...

HARADA
KATSUMI
...!

YOU CAN'T FOLD ANY MORE.....!
HEH HEH HEH ...
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO GET OUT OF THIS SITUATION...!
AFTER MAKING A BIG DEAL OUT OF IT
BUT ...
YOU CAN'T ...!
EVEN IF YOU WANTED TO EXTEND YOUR LIFE...
AKAGI...
DON'T WORRY .....!
HEH HEH ...


I'LL ABDUCT YOU.....!

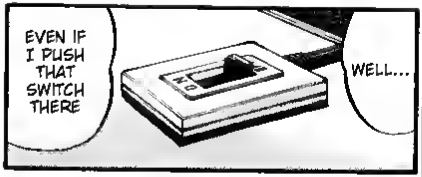
HEH HEH HEH ...
AH..... I GIVE UP...
YOU CAN'T JUST GO SENILE ...!
YOU SHOULD WANT TO LIVE...!
IN A CORNER OF YOUR MIND
YOU HAVE TO WANT TO LIVE ...!
YES...!

YOU SHOULDN'T WANT TO DIE...!
EVEN IF YOU'RE OUT OF IT...
FOOD STILL TASTES GOOD, RIGHT .....?!
AND YOU SHOULD BE FINE WITH WOMEN, TOO...!
I'LL .....
SAVE YOU ...!
HARADA ...
I'M NOT GOING BACK ...!

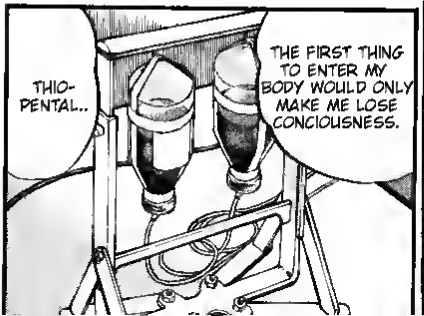
HEH
HEH
HEH
...
.....

I'M NOT TAKING THAT FOR AN ANSWER ...!
WELL...
I'LL JUST DO WHAT I WANT ...!
THAT'S FINE...!
YOU'RE DENYING IT...!
ALL THE WAY TO THE END ...
YOU CAN'T .....!
I'LL ABDUCT YOU BY FORCE ...!

I'LL DIE BEFORE THAT HAPPENS...!


EVEN IF I PUSH THAT SWITCH THERE
WELL....

HEH HEH...
URGH ...!


THIO-PENTAL..
THE FIRST THING TO ENTER MY BODY WOULD ONLY MAKE ME LOSE CONCIOUSNESS.

SO...
IT WILL BE A MINUTE LATER...
YES... AFTER PUSHING THE SWITCH...
THE SODIUM CHLORIDE AND SUCCINYLCHOLINE SOLUTION THAT WILL TAKE ME TO DEATH WILL ENTER MY BLOODSTREAM AFTER THAT...
BUT...
YOU CAN CAPTURE ME BEFORE THAT ...!
ANY WAY YOU LOOK AT IT
I WON'T BE ABLE TO DIE WITH THIS MACHINE.

IF I BITE OFF MY TONGUE, IT'S A WHOLE DIFFERENT STORY...!

ざわ...
THE WAY I PLANNED TO DIE
IT'S REALLY NOT A PROBLEM ...!
DEAD IS DEAD ...!
WILL HAVE CHANGED, BUT

WELL...
.....

I CAN'T FIGHT THAT...
I WILL DIE, BUT...
THAT I WOULDN'T GET TO EXCHANGE WORDS WITH TEN AND HIRO.
MY ONLY REGRET WOULD BE...

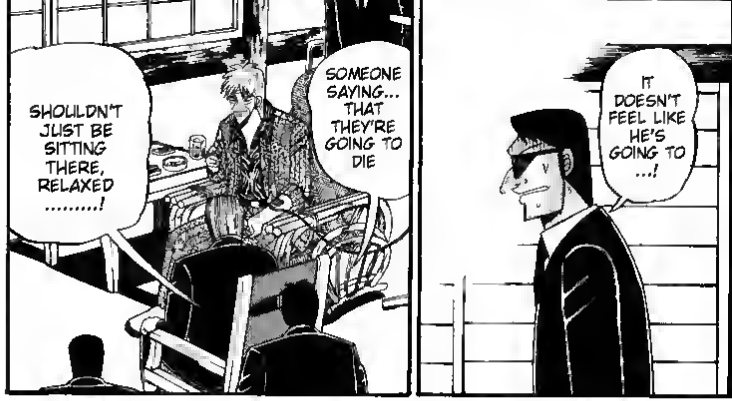
THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO.....!
IT'S FATE.

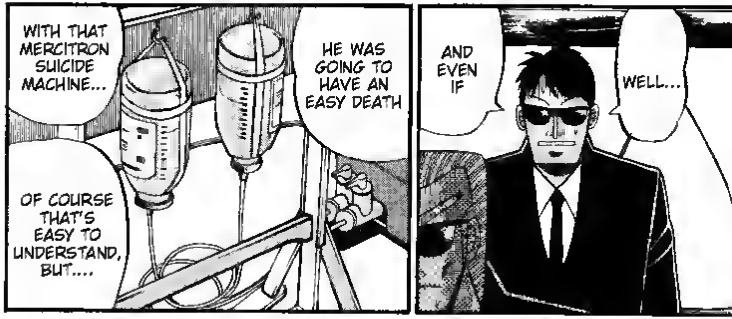
GH...!

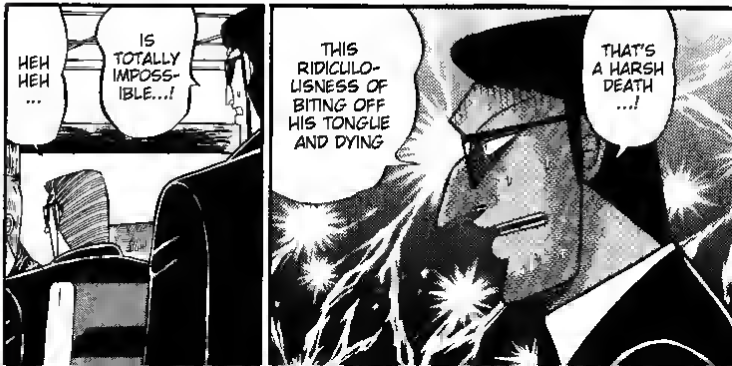
KH...!

CHAPTER 151
THE TASTE OF DEATH

ざっ
BOSS ……!
IT'S A BLUFF...
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THAT ……?
OH, REALLY ……?
HE'S NOT GOING TO DIE ...!
IT'S OKAY ...!
ざわ ざわ


SHOULDN'T JUST BE SITTING THERE, RELAXED .....!
SOMEONE SAYING... THAT THEY'RE GOING TO DIE
IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE HE'S GOING TO ...!

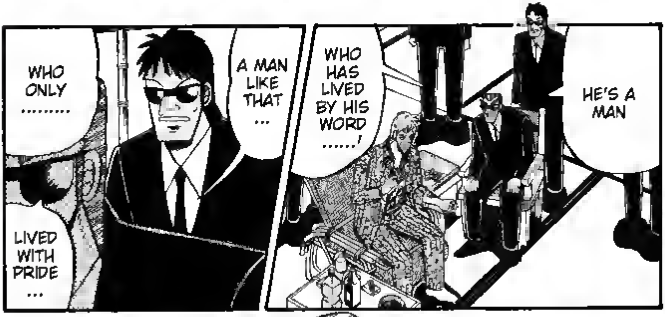

WITH THAT MERCITRON SUICIDE MACHINE...
HE WAS GOING TO HAVE AN EASY DEATH
OF COURSE THAT'S EASY TO UNDERSTAND, BUT....
AND EVEN IF
WELL...


HEH HEH ...
IS TOTALLY IMPOSS-IBLE...!
THIS RIDICULO-LISNESS OF BITING OFF HIS TONGUE AND DYING
THAT'S A HARSH DEATH ...!

HEH HEH HEH ...
ANYONE LOOKING AT HOW RELAXED HE IS
WOULD NORMALLY NEVER BELIEVE THAT HE COULD TAKE A SUDDEN TURN TOWARD SUICIDE .....!
BUT ...
BEING AWARE OF THAT ...
THE THING IS...
YES...
THAT'S TRUE .....!
IT'S TRUE
THAT THERE'S NO SIGN HE'S GOING TO DIE...!

WITH AKAGI SHGERU .....
IT'S COMPLETELY DIFFERENT .....!
.....
HEH HEH HEH ...
.....
.....
WITH THIS MAN..
.....

THAT SO FAR IN HIS LIFE .....
YOU COULD SAY..


WHO ONLY .....
A MAN LIKE THAT ...
WHO HAS LIVED BY HIS WORD .....!
HE'S A MAN
LIVED WITH PRIDE ...

BETRAY HIS OWN WORDS .....!
WOULD NEVER
AT HIS LAST STAND

.....
.....
ooo

ざわ…

CHANGE OF PLANS ...!

FALL BACK, ALL OF YOU...
YOU CAN LEAVE .....!

YEAH ...
ARE YOU SURE .....?
A...
ざわ...

GO ...!
.....
.....
EXCUSE US...!
EXCUSE US...!
THEN...
.....
ピン

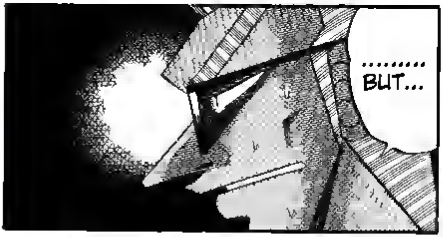
HEH
HEH
HEH
...
.....

..... WHAT A RELIEF .....!
I HATE IT... BEING IN PAIN .....
I WANT TO AVOID A TERRIBLE DEATH LIKE THAT ONE..
AND BLEEDING ...!
..... IF I CAN .....

HEH HEH HEH ...
.....
CH'...!
YOU REALLY ...
MUST BE GLAD YOU CARRIED IT OFF ...
HA HA HA ...!
MAYBE SO .....!
.....
CH'...!
ガ!

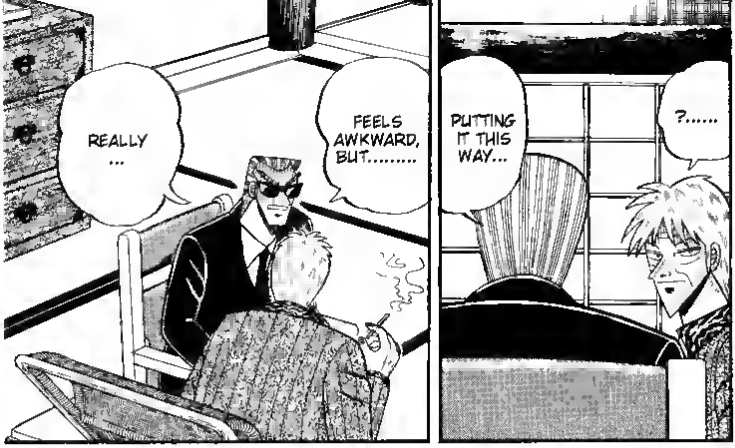
IF WORST CAME TO WORST .....
IF I MADE A WRONG STEP
I GUESS I HAVE TO APOLOGIZE ....
BUT, WELL...
IF YOU DIED....
HEH HEH HEH ...
WOULD HAVE HAD HARD FEELINGS ...
TEN AND HIRO...!
THE ONES WAITING TO GO NEXT

IF YOU REALLY WEREN'T INTENDING TO LIVE...
EVEN IF I COULD ABDUCT YOU
AND...
.....
IT'S THE SAME THING ...!
WHATEVER WAY YOU WERE GOING TO DO IT... IT'S EASY TO DIE...!
HEH HEH...
THEN ABDUCTING YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN USELESS FROM THE BEGINNING ...!
IF YOU'RE SAYING ALL ALONG THAT YOU WANT TO DIE
IN SHORT ...


.....
BUT...

HMM...?

"DESPITE THAT"...
I THINK...!


REALLY ...
FEELS AWKWARD, BUT.....
PUTTING IT THIS WAY...
?.....

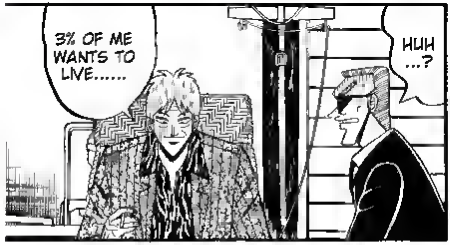
EVEN ONLY 1%.....
WANT TO LIVE .....?
DOESN'T EVEN A TINY PART OF YOU .....

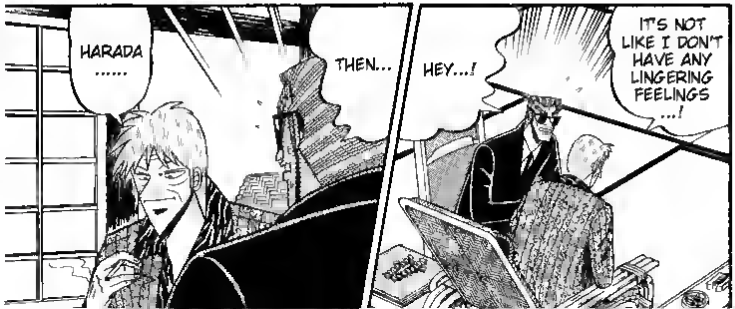
NO...
TRULY, FROM YOUR HEART ...

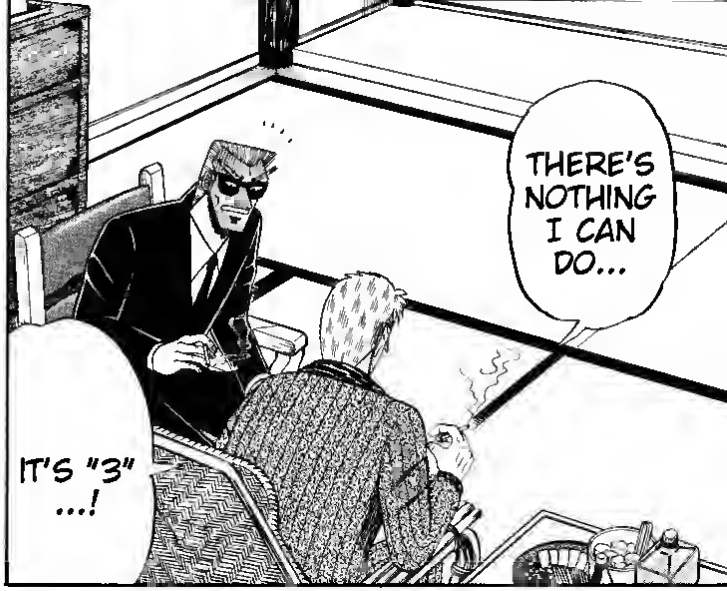
ISN'T THERE ANYTHING ...?!
HEH HEH HEH ...

IT'S AROUND "1"...

MAYBE "3"...!


3% OF ME WANTS TO LIVE.....
HUH ...?


HARADA .....
THEN...
HEY...!
IT'S NOT LIKE I DON'T HAVE ANY LINGERING FEELINGS ...!


THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO...
IT'S "3" ...!

AS FAR AS LIFE GOES...
HUH ...?

CAN NEVER BE COMPLETELY EXTING-UISHED ...!
THE FEELING OF WANTING TO LIVE

NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY.....
IT CAN NEVER BE BLACK-AND-WHITE...
THERE HAS TO BE...!
THERE'S ABOUT "3" MIXED IN.
ALL I CAN DO NOW...
SO...
.....
IT'S ALWAYS A MIXTURE ...!
THAT'S THE TASTE OF DEATH ...
JUST GIVE UP .....
THAT IT ISN'T THAT EASY TO DIE .....!
IS BE RESIGNED TO IT...!
ALL I CAN DO IS PREPARE FOR IT .....!

THIS IS THE TASTE OF DEATH...!